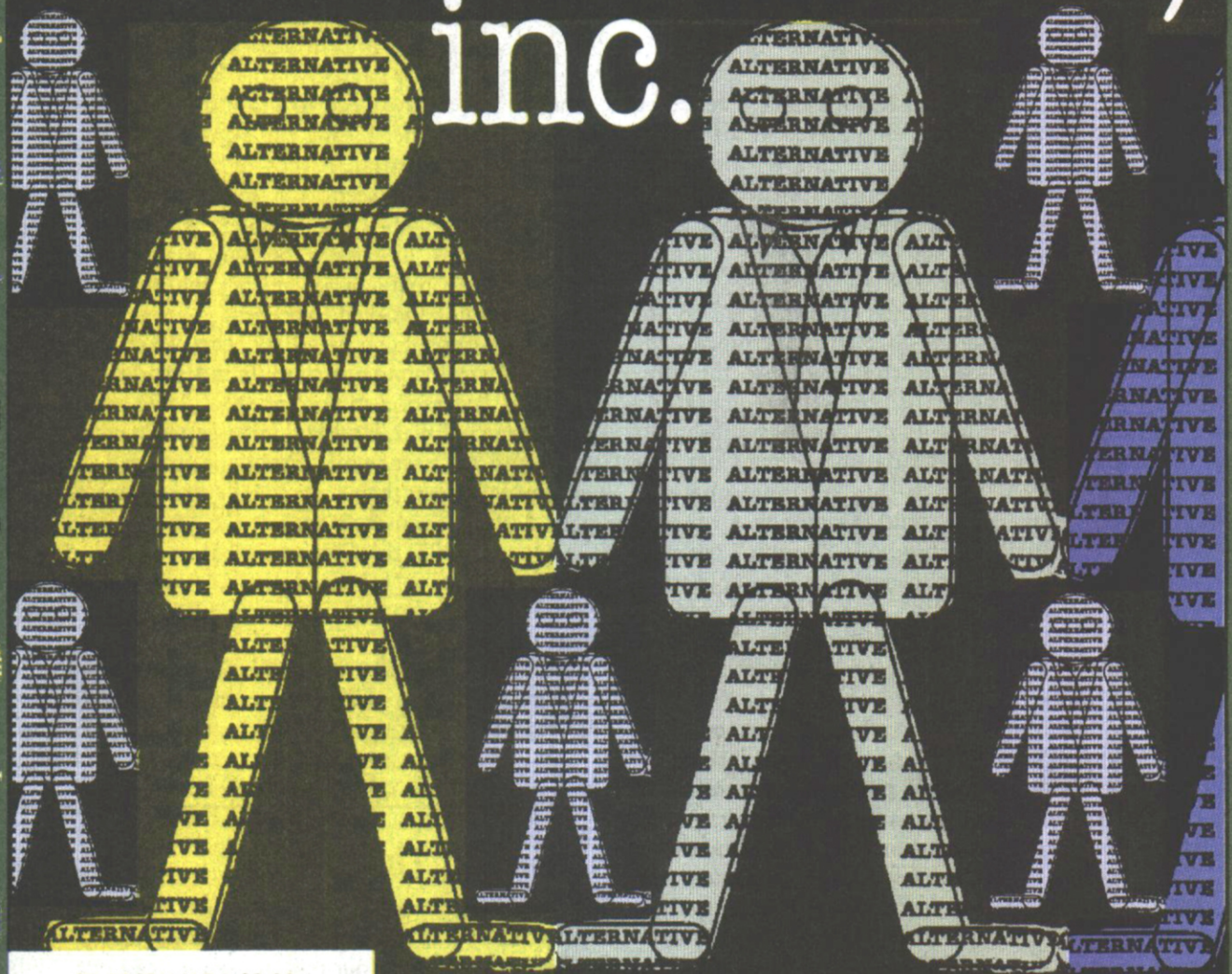
JOEL BLEIFUSS ON THE ASBESTOS OF THE '90s

August 21 - September 17, 1995

In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

alternative, inc.



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34

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- the corporate makeover of alternative weeklies
- the left press' white-guy problem

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EDITORIAL

STOP SUPPORTING NATIONALISM IN BOSNIA

The Croatian blitzkrieg in Krajina casts a revealing light on the war games being played in the former Yugoslavia. It shows that behind an altogether convincing façade of bungling indecision the Clinton administration has in fact decisively committed a grave error. It has sided with one dangerous nationalism against another: the Croatian against the Serbian.

While public debate in the United States focused on lifting the arms embargo on the Bosnian government, the Clinton administration was quietly bowing to the combined influence of pro-Croatian German diplomacy and those in the domestic military-intelligence establishment who are anxious to ensure that the end of the Cold War does not weaken NATO. For the "national interest" school of policy-makers, the crucial factor in a regional war is not who is "right" and who is "wrong," but who promises to be the most useful client state. This appears to be Franjo Tudjman's Catholic Croatia, primed for centuries by the Vatican's war against orthodox "schismatics" to see themselves as the "bulwark of Western civilization" against "Eastern barbarians."

Despite his posturing as the conscience of an indignant "international community," President Clinton helped set up the United Nations as the fall guy to be blamed for the inevitable debacle in the Balkans. The United States has evaded its international responsibility by appealing to the "lessons of Vietnam" and reducing those lessons to a single tenet: Don't send in U.S. ground troops. Clinton has considered only air strikes from a safe distance, lifting the arms embargo, or both: the "lift and strike" option. This is merely the latest application of "Vietnamization": Arm the locals to achieve U.S. aims, and bomb the enemy from a safe distance.

This strategy requires taking sides between clearly identified adversaries. For that reason, it is particularly ill-suited to a complicated civil conflict, with not two but many "sides," in which lines between adversaries and between right and wrong can fluctuate unpredictably. But if the strategy doesn't suit the war, the war may be made to suit the strategy.

The highly emotional debate over lifting the arms embargo to help the Bosnians is largely beside the point. The embargo has been persistently violated, with the evident complicity of certain key NATO members. But only light arms have reached the Bosnians because the Croatians used their geographic position to intercept heavy weapons intended for Bosnia, using them to build up their own powerful new army—an army that was launched into battle with the discreet blessings of its German and American benefactors.

The strategy of the Bosnian government in Sarajevo has always been to draw the United States into the war on its side. Lifting the arms embargo—with the U.S. training Bosnian forces in the use of American weapons—has been seen as a step in that direction. But Bosnia-Herzegovina's real problem is less the embargo than geography: its enclave position makes the Bosnians dependent on Croatia, a dependence that the United States and NATO have worked to deepen.

Despite open Serb hostility, the West encouraged Bosnia-Herzegovina to declare its independence from the Yugoslav Federation in the spring of 1992, thus precipitating the civil war. Bosnian Serbs seized territory in the north and the east, while Croatians invaded the southwest, carrying out their own equally brutal but less publicized "ethnic cleansing" against the Muslim population. On May 7, 1992, the Croat nationalists proclaimed their own breakaway "Herceg-Bosnia," with its capital in Mostar, where Croatian shelling reduced the old Muslim city to ruins.

While Bosnian Serbs were being branded, quite rightly, as war criminals, their Croatian counterparts from Herceg-Bosnia were coaxed by the United States into an

Continued on page 23

Double *Times*

Careful readers will note that the cover date of our current issue runs from August 25 to September 17—a full four weeks as opposed to our regular two. Instead of publishing an issue in early September, we'll be taking the extra time to prepare a special fall books issue. That double issue issue will be dated September 18-October 1, and listed as Volume 19, Numbers 21 & 22.

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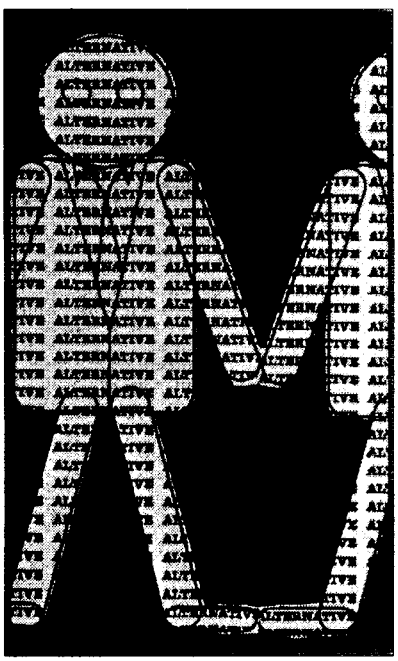
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In THESE TIMES

CONTENTS

Volume 19, Number 20



Alternative, Inc.

Chain reaction

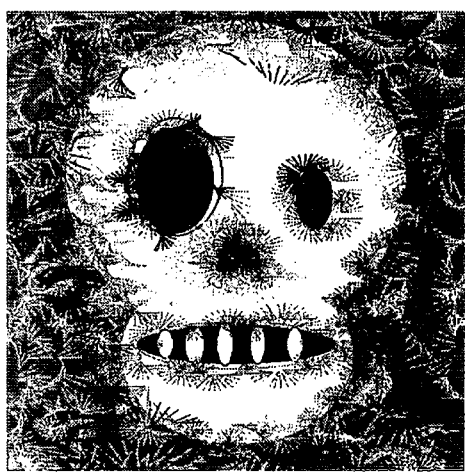
The franchising of America's free weeklies

DAVID ARMSTRONG • 14

Colorless

The left press confronts its white-guy problem

SALIM MUWAKKIL • 19



Back to the future

Is fiberglass the asbestos of the 90s?

JOEL BLEIFUSS • 12

FEATURES

Anti-labor laws • David Moberg 21
Message in a baby bottle • Linda Baker 24
Blowing away the ozone • Christian Parenti 28

REVIEWS

Film: ***Safe*** • Pat Dowell 30
Books: ***To Renew America*** • John K. Wilson 32
Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws • William D. Hartung 35

DEPARTMENTS

Letters 4
Sylvia · Nicole Hollander 4
In Short 6
Appall-O-Meter 6
Media Watch · Jennifer Gonnerman 8
Tomorrow's news · Steve Brodner 9
In Person · Patrick Z. McGavin 10
Etc. · Joel Bleifuss 10
Huge Mouth · Peter Hannan 13
Classifieds 37

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LETTERS

Huffing and puffing

I read Robert W. McChesney's "Telecon" (*ITT*, July 10) with anticipation, hoping for guidance as a worker in the Internet vineyards. I didn't get any. McChesney was long on broadcasting history and radical rhetoric—neither of which gets us very far in dealing with what's before us.

It's possible to infer from the article that McChesney has never used the Internet, for he displays little knowledge of its capabilities and no understanding of what makes it different from broadcasting media. I would be interested in an analysis of how the fabricated nature of the Internet makes it different (or doesn't) from the free airwaves of broadcasting. McChesney, with his historical understanding of broadcasting, is uniquely placed to advise.

The distinctive character of the Internet is its two-way communication potential. Many academic and consumer groups, in trying to affect the telecommunications bill, have made preservation of the network's two-way nature the linchpin of efforts to maintain public space on the Net. McChesney's article doesn't mention this; again, he is well placed to make comparisons and provide analysis.

Unfortunately, overblown rhetoric about "a handful of transnational corporations guided strictly by profit" (did we not know this?) is a poor substitute for analysis. I keep hoping to see in *ITT* some analysis and guidance for readers trying—in an unregenerately capitalist world—to act, at least occasionally, in accord with democratic socialist principles. Huffing and puffing won't do either job. Please try again, Mr. McChesney—you've got the tools.

Peter Graham
South Orange, N.J.

In fact ...

I want to thank you for your George Seldes remembrance (*ITT*, July 24), but I wanted to point out an error at the end of the piece.

I.F. Stone's Weekly began publication in January 1953, not in the fall of 1950, when Seldes suspended publication of *In fact* (the "f" was always lowercased, as you might remember).

At first, Izzy wanted to call his weekly *In fact*, but George advised him not to because of all the trouble he got into in the final years of his newsletter. George was happy to give Izzy his mailing list—"the five-dollar liberals," as George called them—to help him get started.

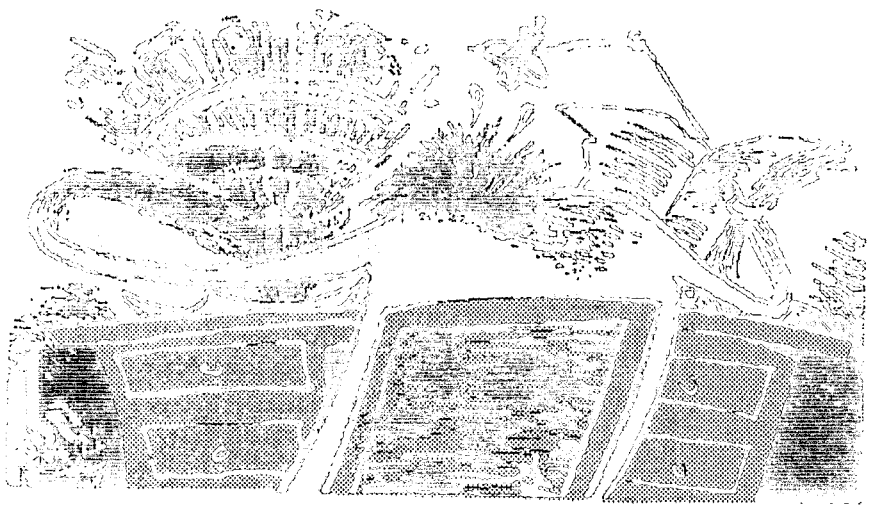
George was the living link between the age of muckrakers such as Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair and Izzy Stone and the modern era of alternative journalism—of which *ITT* is such an important part. The exposé on the link between cigarette smoking and cancer was the accomplishment George was proudest of. James Weinstein is but one of countless Americans whose lives may have been saved by him.

Thanks again for letting *ITT* read-

SYLVIA — by Nicole Hollander



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ers know about the life of George Seldes. He was a kind and generous man who was never afraid of the word "truth."

Randolph T. Holhut
editor, *The George Seldes Reader*
Putney, Vt.

Itchy trigger finger

Whoa, amigo, slow down and get your categories straightened out! I refer to your July 24 editorial "Clinton gears up for 1996," in which you lump the National Rifle Association (NRA) with Jesse Helms as a safe target on the extreme right.

No way, José. Jesse Helms is a senile obscenity, a cancerous wart on the body politic. The NRA is an organization that has upheld the U.S. Constitution for the past 124 years and, if we're at all lucky, will continue doing so for at least the next century and a quarter.

Don't you see that the NRA's fight against overbearing government is the same as that fought by the underground press in the far-off and forgotten '60s? And that it's the same fight you and a handful of others are keeping up today?

It's not about guns—it's about freedom. That's the basic message the NRA is trying to convey, and the one that's being lost in all the verbal flak in the media. "With liberty and justice for all" is the motto on your masthead. Can't you see that what *ITT* envisions has much in common with the NRA?

Think back a bit to the 1930s, when Hitler began by registering firearms and then confiscated them when he was ready to make his move. The only thing keeping politicians in check is the knowledge that there are firearms in private hands, with people ready to use them, if need be, to uphold and defend their rights. "In any civilized country, you don't need guns," you write. I agree. The minute this country becomes civilized, you let me know. Until then, in the words of an old-time revolutionary, "I am keeping my powder dry."

Alex Apostolides
El Paso, Texas

On the road

I thoroughly enjoyed William Upski Wimsatt's summary of his experiences in America's cities (*ITT*, July 24). So little has changed in the past 30 years: When I was living on Chicago's South Side between 1965 and 1968, I was determined to go where I wanted. And I ran into the same warnings that Wimsatt received. I asked an African-American man for directions who, after giving them, told me that it was foolish for me to ask directions of others; and after waiting one night for a colleague on the corner of 65th and Cottage Grove, her husband told me that *he* would never stand there alone.

The only problem I ever had was late at night, walking home from a party in Hyde Park, when some youngster grabbed me—I just kept walking, swore at him angrily, and he left. Given the prevalence of drugs I suppose I wouldn't be so cavalier these days, but I do agree with Wimsatt, in that attitude had a lot to with my safety. And I feel glad about what I did—that was one battle I didn't lose.

Kate Bradley
Issaquah, Wash.

The wrong message

I was glad to see some candid reporting on U.S. policy toward Turkey's latest assault on its Kurds (*ITT*, July 24). Jennifer Washburn is right in saying that U.S. arms shipments to Turkey send exactly the wrong message with regard to ethnic conflicts.

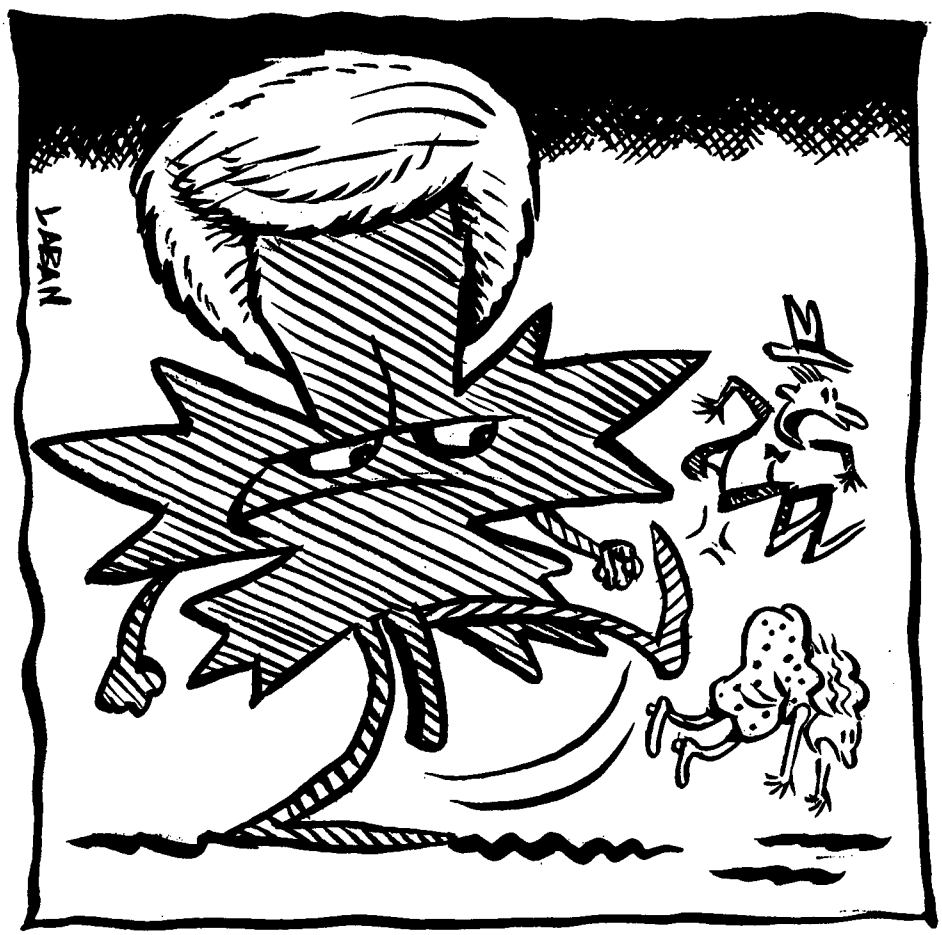
In addition to securing arms shipments, U.S. officials have been pressuring European Union (EU) governments to approve a customs union with Turkey, without regard to European objections to Turkey's assault on its Kurds or its continuing occupation of Cyprus. According to a recent EU report, the division of Cyprus remains a threat to peace and security in the eastern Mediterranean, and the presence of the Turkish army on Cyprus is the major obstacle to ending the stalemate.

By tolerating Turkish actions on Cyprus, the United States has also sent the wrong message to other powers in the region. Statements by Bosnian Serb officials indicate that it has encouraged them to think that they, too, can get away with such actions in Bosnia.

A. Rice
Great Falls, Va.

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InSHORT



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NEWT OF THE NORTH

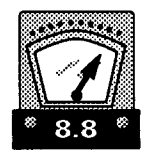
"July 22 is the day it all ends." That's the way one civil servant described the day Mike Harris, the newly elected Conservative premier of Ontario, and his finance minister brought out the long knives. Barely 30 days after his election, Harris stopped construction on most new highways, subways and roads, reduced the province's welfare benefits by 22 percent and effectively eliminated 14,000 government-subsidized day-care spaces. A week earlier, his government announced the end of all provincially mandated affirmative action programs. A week before that, the provincial minister



By David Futrelle

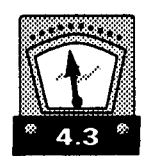
Air force

Acting as his own attorney, an unrepentant former American Airlines pilot has admitted to a U.S. District Court that, yes, he did put his hands up the skirt of a woman passenger during a flight in 1989—but it was just his way of giving "gratification to a lady." And he didn't ask permission before groping, he explained in a speech to the jury, because "a lady never consents." According to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the ex-pilot feels his only crime is being too "assertive" in "politically correct" times. "You don't want a wimpy pilot," he complained, "but that's what society says we're supposed to be—wimpy."



Details analysis

In the August issue of the stylishly vacuous *Details* magazine, editor Joe Dolce waxed eloquent on the deeper meaning of accused Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. And he did it without, like, confusing his readers and stuff! "Inevitably, examining McVeigh tells us more about ourselves that it does about his purported crime," Dolce wrote. "He's a screen to project our fears



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and anxieties, our faiths and convictions onto. Without trivializing the horror he incurred, he is the Keanu Reeves of 1990s American terrorism."

Tough love

What to do if two young girls in the midst of a complicated custody battle refuse to follow a court order to visit their father? According to Associate Judge Ludwig Kuhar of Will County, Illinois, you simply lock them up. When the children, ages 12 and 8, refused to travel



to North Carolina to visit a father they say is "mentally abusive," Kuhar said he had no choice but to send the older sister to a juvenile detention center and to confine her younger sister to her house, the *Chicago Tribune* reports. Both were released after a day, and the Illinois Appellate Court is examining the matter.

Athletic supporter

Those whose passion for O.J. has not yet been sated by joke T-shirts and television coverage can now avail themselves of the official O.J. "Athlete of the Century" commemorative medallion for only $59.95, the *Chicago Tribune* reports. Entrepreneur Larry Labell, who expects to make money



whether or not Simpson is acquitted, doesn't seem overly interested in the technicalities of O.J.'s case. "I say," he explained to the *Tribune*, "this man was voted 'athlete of the century' by sportswriters, that he's very, very charitable and that he was very good to the Brown family, irrespective of what happened."

responsible for municipal affairs explained the government's new public housing policy: "There will be no more."

Two billion dollars were eliminated from the $50 billion provincial budget on July 22. But that was only the beginning: Harris said the province must cut at least $4-6 billion more over the next five years. In the fall, he is expected to cut as many as 20,000 of the province's 100,000 civil service jobs, to raise Canada's traditionally affordable public university tuition to levels more in line with private American university rates, and to cut funding to Canada's coveted universal health care system. Harris claims he is moving so quickly to slash the province's budget in order to honor his contract with the people of Ontario and deliver on his campaign pledge to cut the provincial tax rate by 30 percent.

Sound familiar? Harris, who has been dubbed "Newt North" by the Toronto media, is aiming to shrink Ontario's Scandinavian-style welfare state to a size last seen in the 1960s. "The Common Sense Revolution," the 30-page campaign document that spells out the Conservatives' plan to eviscerate Ontario's much-envied social programs, reads like the Republicans' Contract with America. In fact, the two documents may have shared a contributing author. Republican strategist and Contract collaborator Michael Murphy, a close friend of Conservative campaign chairman Tom Long, is reported to have helped draft the Common Sense Revolution.

Despite such alien influences, the Conservative victory was a made-in-Canada disaster. In the past, the Canadian middle class could usually be counted on to support liberal policies and to reject the kind of anti-state rhetoric normally associated with the American new right. Ontario's Tories, who governed uninterruptedly between 1943 and 1985, instituted most of the social welfare policies now under attack by Harris. And popular suspicion of right-wing tendencies contributed to the Conservatives' fall from power in 1985, when party leader Frank Miller shocked the province by admitting that one of his heroes was Ronald Reagan.

At the start of last June's election campaign, many wrote Harris off as being too far outside Ontario's liberal mainstream. But in a series of television ads that attacked the provincial bureaucracy as a tool for minorities, welfare recipients and "special interests," Harris was able to recast himself as the populist defender of the overtaxed suburbs. The Conservatives came from behind to win close to 50 percent of the vote, sweeping almost every rural seat in the province and taking all of the 17 suburban seats that encircle Toronto.

The June election results are all the more puzzling as Canada's Conservatives were thought to have gone the way of the dodo following their humiliating defeat by the Liberals in the 1993 federal election, when their parliamentary representation fell from 157 seats to two. Though all political parties in Canada have aped the austerity policies now ascendant around the world, Ontario has become a laboratory for neo-conservative policies that would once have been rejected as too foreign (read "too American") to be taken seriously. But unlike the Republican Congress, which, at least, may be restrained by a Democratic president from time to time, Harris has an absolute parliamentary majority—meaning that he is free to govern virtually by decree, and will work speedily to turn Canada into some sort of Great Right North.

—Jason Ziedenberg

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SALVADORAN SKELETONS

After 10 years of secrecy, some troubling skeletons may have fallen out of the Reagan administration's closet—83 to be exact. According to two recent articles in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, that's the number of Salvadorans killed by U.S. troops during a top secret 1985 raid on a rebel camp.

"The mission was, nobody was going to leave that camp alive," said an ex-Army Ranger who claims to have participated in the raid. The ex-Ranger told *Post-Intelligencer* military reporter Ed Offley that 11 Rangers from Ft. Lewis in Washington carried out the raid, which was a retaliatory strike against Salvadoran guerrillas responsible for the killing of six Americans in San Salvador in late June 1985.

Although Offley says "there is no doubt in my mind that this occurred," the stories—which raise troubling questions about the extent of U.S. involvement in Central America's dirty wars—are viewed more skeptically by some. The Pentagon denies the raid ever took place. In response to questions about the *Post-Intelligencer*'s June 15 and July 4 stories, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Rick Scott, a Pentagon spokesman, repeated the statement he gave to Offley: "We have checked this allegation through our U.S. Southern Command in Panama and our U.S. Special Operations Command in Florida and the U.S. Army. We find no information to substantiate this allegation."

However, a recent report by CBS' *60 Minutes*—though not touching on the alleged raid—suggests that the Pentagon has been less than candid in discussing other aspects of the United States' involvement in El Salvador. Three weeks before the *Post-Intelligencer*'s first article appeared, *60 Minutes* aired a story reporting that U.S. troops in El Salvador—though ordered by Congress to serve only as advisers—frequently found themselves in combat situations. The story focused on former U.S. officers who have been trying to get combat medals for troops who served in El Salvador during the 1980s. The Pentagon refuses to issue the medals because the move would effectively refute its longstanding insistence that American advisers never served in combat roles.



One of the officers who spoke to *60 Minutes*, Ret. Brig. Gen. Joseph Stringham, was also quoted in the *Post-Intelligencer*'s July 4 follow-up story. Although Stringham, the senior U.S. military adviser in El Salvador in early 1985, acknowledged that American troops had seen combat, he insisted that the raid reported by Offley "didn't happen." Stringham said no Rangers served in El Salvador during the country's 10-year civil war, and that if any such raid had occurred, "It couldn't possibly have happened without my knowledge."

Former guerrillas in El Salvador also dispute certain details of the *Post-Intelligencer* story. In a June 17 article in the Salvadoran daily newspaper *La Prensa Grafica*, Nidia Diaz, a leader of the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers,

MEDIA BEAT

By Jennifer Gonnerman

Omissions of guilt

By now, everyone knows of Susan Smith, the young South Carolina mother recently sentenced to life in prison for drowning her two sons. Less well known is Smith's stepfather, Beverly Russell, a Christian Coalition member who in 1988 admitted to fondling Smith's breasts, French-kissing her and forcing her to rub his genitals. At the time, Smith and her mother did not bring criminal charges, and, despite court-ordered therapy, Russell, 47, continued to molest his stepdaughter. The incest started when Smith was 15 and continued until age 23. In its wrap-up of Smith's trial, the Associated Press sympathetically reported that Russell was "still depressed about molesting Ms. Smith."

Part of the reason for the kid-gloves treatment of Russell turns on the question of consent. In April, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that "[Smith] and her stepfather had had a sexual relationship since she was 15, but, terming it 'an affair,' she said she was a willing participant." The *Observer*, which broke the story, based its report on records of a conversation Smith had had with a psychiatrist and social worker when she was 17. Smith had just attempted suicide and—when she and her mother were questioned by the counselors afterward—Smith said she'd had an "affair" with her stepfather "because she was jealous her mother got all his attention."

The Associated Press

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seized on this juicy nugget, sending out a story on the wire headlined: "Smith, Stepfather Had Affair Through Last Year." Absent from this story was the fact that Smith had termed the relationship an "affair" only days after she had swallowed 30 aspirin and landed in the hospital.

Despite this crucial omission, the article was picked up by newspapers across the country. Suddenly, this was no longer the story of a teenage girl being sexually assaulted by her 6-foot-4, 300-pound stepfather. Instead of interpreting Smith's claim of "consent" as yet another indicator of how emotionally disturbed she was, the media kept referring to this incestuous relationship as an "affair." Lost was the fact that a 15-year-old girl cannot legally consent to sex with anyone.

In the wake of the Susan Smith trial, few newspapers ran stories exploring the difficult subjects of incest and childhood sexual abuse. One notable exception was the *Washington Post*, which revealed that an estimated eight to 12 percent of young girls are the victims of incest. In addition, close to 20 percent of young girls who are molested are afflicted by serious psychiatric disorders in their adulthood. A *San Diego Union-Tribune* editorial also examined this topic. The paper published a fact that—if it had been known by the reporters writing about the trial—might have resulted in more sensitive coverage. According to the editorial, "Half of all women in prison, like Susan Smith, are victims of childhood sexual abuse."

the rebel faction the Americans allegedly attacked, said no base operated by her group had been wiped out by American troops. "No one remembers this incident happening," said Diaz. "[I]f in reality this did happen, the victims had to have been civilians." When asked whether the *Post-Intelligencer* still stands by its story, World/Nation Editor Bob Schenet said, "We're not backing down from it." Schenet, who edited Offley's articles, said, "sources that we trust said it did happen." He acknowledged, however, that "other sources we trust said it didn't happen."

How does Offley explain this discrepancy? He notes that it is notoriously difficult to provide conclusive evidence that a covert operation occurred. Nevertheless, Offley said his "original sources are very credible. I'm still pursuing this story, and I'm still looking for final proof."

Despite the controversy surrounding Offley's story, Cherrene Horazuk, national director of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, which has long opposed U.S. intervention in the Central American nation, said one thing is clear: "The U.S. military was involved [in El Salvador] to a far greater extent than they are officially admitting. Since the '80s, consecutive administrations have been covering up the real U.S. policy in El Salvador. Before we give out any medals, our representatives must conduct a full and public investigation of the U.S. military role in El Salvador. We need to know ... what part the U.S. military played in human rights abuses."

—D. Hausner

Tomorrow's News Tonight — **By Steve Brodner**

Heritage Foundation hosts Agnew/Bush DC art tour



NEA DEAD
Private funders pick up slack



Time Warner sponsors "The Iceman Cometh"



Disney presents "Death of a Sailorman"

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IN PERSON

OUTLAW AUTEUR

Shekhar Kapur shakes up Indian politics with his movie Bandit Queen

Like all Indian filmmakers, Shekhar Kapur has had to pay his dues to India's prolific, genre-driven movie industry. But after directing a romantic melodrama and a popular musical, Kapur has managed to realize a lifelong ambition: His third movie, last year's *Bandit Queen*, is a substantial, politically relevant film.

As a "serious" Indian filmmaker, Kapur works in the daunting shadow cast by the late Bengali director Satyajit Ray. For many critics outside India, Ray's commanding reputation established the tone and essential shape of Indian cinema today. "His films are what I call brilliant cinema," Kapur says. "[But] they never provoke you into action. He had a way of getting at your intellect through your emotions." In contrast to Ray's patient, reflective humanism, Kapur has chosen a confrontational, politically charged style. "If I see a man dying, rather than put his fate into something neat, I put the camera right into his face and say, 'This must not happen!' "

Kapur, a high-caste Hindu born in Bombay and educated in London, has chosen India's insular, often cruel caste society as the target of his new film. *Bandit Queen* is Kapur's attempt to bridge the existential chasm separating what he calls the "two Indias," to expose to India's intellectually and emotionally detached urban elite the grinding oppression and inhumane cruelty suffered by the country's rural lower castes.

The film restages the events of February 14, 1981, when lower-caste villager Phoolan Devi and her itinerant band of renegades killed 22 higher-caste Thakurs in retaliation for a gruesome sexual assault. Born into the *mallah*, a subclan of the lowest echelon of Hindu society, the 35-year-old Devi had been sold into an arranged marriage at age 11 for a cow and a rusted-out bicycle. She was repeatedly raped by her 31-year-old husband, initiating a brutal cycle of physical torture and sexual subjugation that reached its pinnacle when nearly 30 higher Thakurs participated in a gang rape of Devi that lasted 23 days. After a few years on the run, Devi surrendered to authorities in 1983, eventually serving 11 years in prison despite never being formally tried.

From its opening scenes of Devi cursing her tormentors to images of rape, death, sexual violence and physical abuse, *Bandit Queen* is a frank and, at times, brutal film. Refusing to shrink from realistic depiction of still-taboo subject matter—nudity, sexuality, a dissatisfied woman protesting her status—Kapur has rejected Indian social and cinematic conventions of propriety and restraint, forcing his audience to confront the cultural and social implications of Phoolan Devi's story.

Bandit Queen has a dual ambition—to challenge the complacency of an urban audience that has become inured to the type of horrors Devi experienced, and to deny that audience the kind of cathartic release it has come to expect from Indian cinema. "For me, I had to stop the film from being voyeuristic," Kapur says. "All of us in urban India look at this story as happening somewhere else. I wanted to find new ways to make the audiences uncomfortable; they've become so used to the cinematic grammar."

ETC.

By Joel Bleifuss

Legal unease at Mickey D's

The longest libel trial in British history is now in its second year, but the end may be in sight.

On June 28, 1994, McDonald's sued two unemployed anarchists, Dave Morris and Helen Steel, who in the 1980s had distributed anti-McDonald's tracts. (See "The First Stone," Dec. 26, 1994.) In turn, the "McLibel 2," as Morris and Steel are now known, countersued. In a statement released in June, they said, "We believe that it is a right and possibly even a duty to criticize the practices of multinational corporations that dominate our lives."

Morris and Steel are frustrated that journalists have largely ignored the meaty issues of the suit and, instead, used the occasion to yuk it up. A case in point is the *Wall Street Journal*'s Kyle Pope, who, in a rather thin July 18 account of the case, couldn't restrain himself from the following observation: "It seemed McDonald's and its blue-chip legal team would quickly make hamburger out of the vegetarian activists. Instead, the two have managed to embroil McDonald's in a trial that has now run for 13 months, making the O.J. Simpson murder trial look like a quick takeout."

Both libel suits are being heard concurrently. And, recently, both sides have been trying to negotiate an end to the trial. On June 28, Morris and Steel agreed to let McDonald's out of the case if the company would pledge to never again sue its critics, and to apologize to the many people the company has sued, or threat-

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ened to sue—like Britain's Prince Philip.

McDonald's management is under increasing pressure to end what the London *Independent* describes as a "public relations nightmare." Indeed, rumblings from the belly of the burger beast indicate that the trial is not going down too well. Last May, at McDonald's annual meeting in Chicago, shareholder Mike Dursmid took the floor. "McDonald's should abandon this frivolous lawsuit," he said. "This whole PR disaster has been embarrassing for me as a stockholder, and we would do a lot better to listen more and sue less."

States of disarray

The full impact of the Christian right's political influence is being felt more in state legislatures than in Washington, according to a recent report by People For the American Way. The 1994 election saw the number of states in which Republicans control both the legislative and executive branches jump from four to 15.

"Scores of newly elected legislators and governors are operating from the premise that they owe their jobs to the religious right political movement," said the group's research director, Matthew Freeman.

So far this year, the God squad has helped pass school-prayer legislation in Tennessee, Louisiana and Utah; laws restricting abortion in Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Montana, Ohio, South Dakota and Tennessee; and measures curtailing freedom of speech on the Internet in Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Oklahoma and Virginia.

Seema Biswas in Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen.*

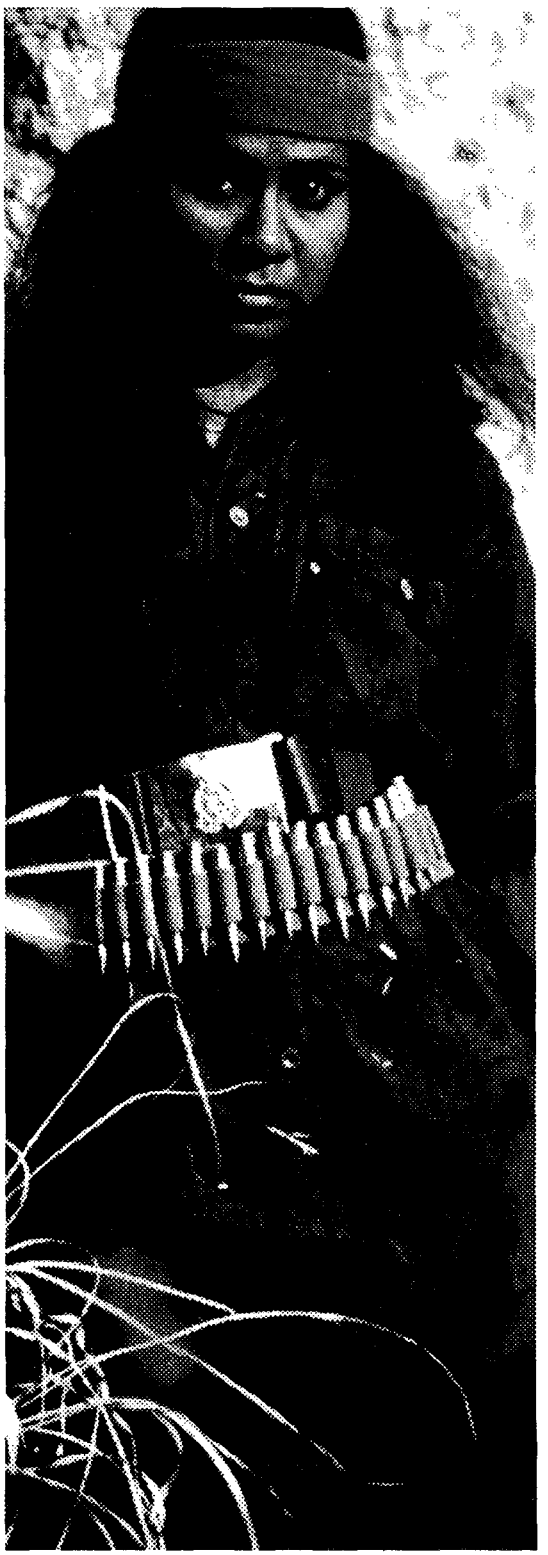


PHOTO: BOBBY BEDI ©ARROW RELEASING

As might be expected, making such a film had immediate political consequences. *Bandit Queen* remains banned in its native land. Kapur has refused to make the 25 cuts involving nudity, profanity and rape sequences the censor panel has demanded before it approves the film for commercial exhibition.

Unexpectedly, though, Phoolan Devi herself was for a time the film's most vociferous critic. Although Kapur feels he took great pains to show that Devi was trapped by her caste designation, leaving violence and rebellion as her sole means of escaping a life of degradation, Devi denounced *Bandit Queen* in what he sees as an attempt to preserve her political legitimacy with her lower-caste constituency. "She is being groomed for a political career," Kapur notes. "As such, she has to be perceived as a post-menopausal woman. As long as you are sexually active, you cannot be respected because there is no respect for sex."

Kapur places a great deal of the blame for Devi's troubled public image on the "irresponsibility" of the Indian media coverage of her case. The press, he claims, "made her out to be this legendary, revolutionary beauty. When she surrendered and the press discovered she was a very ordinary woman ... they turned against her and said she was a killer. Just because she didn't rise to their expectations of being a beautiful woman."

In *Bandit Queen* the personal and the political collide, as Shekhar Kapur transcends an imperfect system to expose the troubling and inhumane treatment of the dispossessed. Whatever the political fallout, the censors cannot remove that fact from history—or prevent Kapur's voice from being heard.

—Patrick Z. McGavin

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THE FIRST STONE

FIBERGLASS, THE ASBESTOS OF THE '90S

By Joel Bleifuss

By the mid-1980s, after prevaricating for 50 years, the asbestos industry finally accepted that its product was a potent carcinogen. Consequently, the commercial uses of this fireproof mineral were phased out and, in many cases, fiberglass took its place. Like asbestos, glass wool is a good thermal insulator. Unfortunately, fiberglass is just as deadly as asbestos, which by the end of the century will have killed 300,000 Americans, according to Philip Landrigan, editor of the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine.*

When inhaled, small particles of fiberglass can, like asbestos, lodge in the lung. Once in the lung these microscopic shards of glass can pierce the cell walls, damage the cell's chromosomes, and thus cause cancer. The fiberglass bits can also be coughed up and then swallowed, causing similar harm to other internal organs.

People at risk from fiberglass poisoning include those who install fiberglass insulation or fabricate fiberglass products without a proper respirator. (Paper filters won't do the trick.) Also at risk are homeowners who had their houses—especially attics—insulated with loose fiberglass that was uncontained or improperly applied.

Within the next six months, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) will decide whether to regulate worker exposure to fiberglass. In addition to scientific evidence, the decision-makers at OSHA will have to consider both the general threat posed by a Republican Congress that would like to gut the agency and the political pressure the industry will deploy in Congress. Targeting a ubiquitous manufacturing material like fiberglass is no way to win friends.

Back in 1941, the U.S. Patent Office issued patents for 353 products made from what was known as "glass wool." Today, more than 30,000 commercial products contain fiberglass. And 90 percent of U.S. homes are kept warm with the help of fiberglass insulation.

As has often been the case for other profitable but harmful products made by U.S. corporations, a considerable lag time has elapsed between the discovery that fiberglass is a threat to public health and the point at which policy-makers address the issue. The dangers from fiberglass were first recognized in 1941, when a health researcher noticed an increased incidence of lung problems among workers at Owens-Corning Fiberglas. In 1990, the U.S. National Toxicology Program decided to add fiberglass to the list of poisons contained in the program's *Seventh Annual (1992) Report on Carcinogens.* The report, mandated by Congress, is compiled by representatives from 10 federal agencies. In the case of fiberglass, the agencies unanimously agreed to classify the material as "reasonably anticipated to be a carcinogen," and forwarded their recommendation to the Department of Health and Human Services.

The only studies that give fiberglass a clean bill of health are, not surprisingly, sponsored by the fiberglass industry. The North American Insulation Manufacturers Association brought this research forward in 1993 in an attempt to stop fiberglass from being added to the government's list of carcinogens. The leadership of the International Union of Glass, Molders, Pottery, Plastics & Allied Workers supports the industry campaign. The union, which opposes further regulation of fiberglass, argues that the scientific evidence has been misinterpreted. A lobbying effort by union and industry officials convinced Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala to delay making a final decision on whether to list fiberglass.

To counter these self-serving claims, Peter Infante, an OSHA scientist, published a review of fiberglass research in the March 1994 *American Journal of Industrial Medicine.* "At least 13 studies demonstrate biologically plausible and statistically significant increases in the incidence of lung cancer and mesothelioma [asbestos-related cancers] in rats and hamsters exposed to glass wool by various routes using standard scientific methods," Infante wrote. "On a fiber-per-fiber basis, glass fibers may be as potent or even more potent than asbestos. ... A candid disclosure about the potential risk of lung cancer is warranted."

In June of 1994, in the wake of Infante's report, Health and Human Services finally determined that fiberglass should be listed as a substance "for which there is limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans and/or sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals."

The news made scarcely a ripple in the national media. *In These Times* has learned from a source who asked to remain anonymous that ABC news executives bowed to industry

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pressure and decided not to air a *20/20* investigation on the dangers of fiberglass. What coverage there was played down any threat to public health. Frank Swoboda and Maryann Haggerty in the *Washington Post* reported as fact the assertion of Public Health Service spokesman Bill Grigg that there is no data "that would indicate there's any problem that would involve any consumer or worker."

Grigg is dead wrong. As Infante detailed in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, since 1987 there have been six epidemiological studies that found "a statistically significant elevation in the risk of lung cancer ... among workers exposed to glass wool fibers."

Other research has also pointed to the dangers of fiberglass. Kaye Kilburn, a doctor at the University of Southern California, X-rayed the lungs of 284 workers who had worked for 20 years or more stuffing refrigerator doors with fiberglass insulation at a General Electric refrigerator factory in Cicero, Ill. He found that 6.7 percent of the 284 workers at the plant—workers who had no previous exposure to asbestos but were exposed to fiberglass—suffered lung damage that was "indistinguishable" from damage caused by asbestos. Kilburn concluded: "Commercial rotary spun fiberglass, used for insulating appliances, appears to produce human disease." Workers at this GE plant filed suit and reached an out-of-court settlement that stipulated they would not talk with the press.

In Port Huron, Mich., where United Technologies operates a factory that makes molded automotive insulation out of fiberglass, worker Dean Lavery, 33, sued for work-related injuries. In 1987, the former long-distance runner began waking up in the morning with his face covered in blood from nighttime nosebleeds. His health went downhill from there. Lavery is one of many workers at the plant who have suffered lung damage, allergies and asthma. And he is one of many who settled out of court and cannot now discuss the case.

Jim Worden, a spokesman for Owens-Corning, in Toledo, Ohio, told *In These Times* that both labor and fiberglass manufacturers agree that a commonsensical safety limit is one-glass fiber per cubic centimeter of air—a standard that is half as strict as the current airborne fiberglass regulation currently on the books in Germany. Yet whenever OSHA has discussed making that safety limit law, the insulation industry has come out strongly against the one-fiber-per-cubic-centimeter limit.

"They talk out of both sides of their mouth," says Robert Horowitz, a one-time journalist who became interested in fiberglass while doing a story on asbestos. He is now chairman of Victims of Fiberglass, a nonprofit group in Bryte, Calif. The group's newsletter, *Glassroots of Cancer*, reports on efforts to research and regulate fiberglass in the United States and Europe. "This is one of these cases where it is big money versus no money," says Horowitz. "There is no constituency on the other side of this, other than a scattered group of people who believe they have been injured by fiberglass but can't scientifically prove it."

Victims of Fiberglass doesn't want to put fiberglass makers out of business. The group just wants safety precautions to be strictly followed. For example, anybody who works with fiberglass should wear a respirator. Further, according to Horowitz, certain types of fiberglass applications should be banned, such as the practice of blowing loose glass fibers in attics and walls as a means of insulation.

"The arguments from industry are the same arguments that we've seen time and time again," says Horowitz. "It doesn't matter what the substance is. Whether it is DDT or cigarettes or asbestos, industry says, 'You can't prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are killing you.' But do we have to wait for that absolute scientific proof before we do something? Breathing in microscopic shards of glass could not possibly be good for you." ◀

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH by Peter Hannan



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MEDIA

Alternative, Inc.

The Phoenix-based New Times chain has opened up a brave new world in alternative journalism.

By David Armstrong

It was almost eerie, containing elements of a death foretold. San Francisco's *SF Weekly*, in the cover story of its April 13, 1994 issue, unknowingly contemplated its own demise. Wondering and worrying about the future of alternative newspapers like itself, the *Weekly* cast a cold eye on a predatory Phoenix-based chain called New Times, Inc., the largest publisher of alternative papers in the United States.

"New Times," wrote San Francisco freelance writer Hannah Nordhorn, "might be a paradigm for the new, mainstream brand of alternatives, sort of the Wal-Mart of alternative journalism."

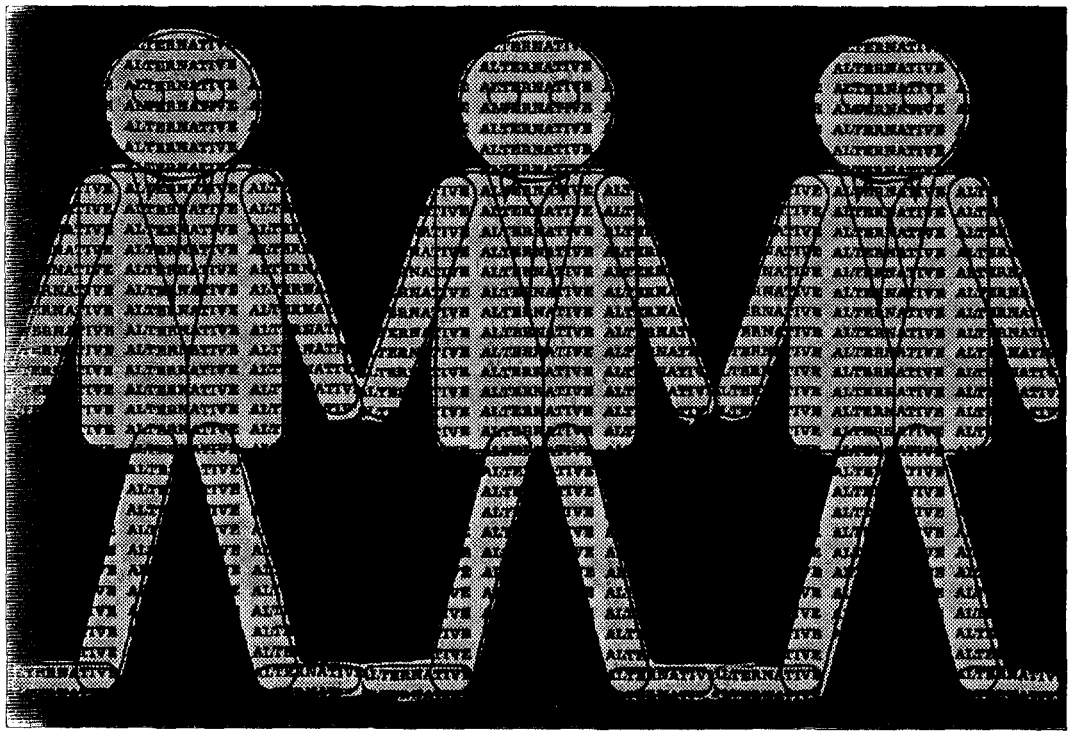
Less than a year after the *Weekly* published Nordhorn's doleful piece, the 6-year-old, 60,000 circulation tabloid became the sixth link in the New Times chain. Today, seven months after its purchase, the *Weekly* is definitely more well-heeled and probably more stable than it was as a stand-alone paper, but its newfound stability comes at a price: the loss of the *Weekly*'s editorial independence, its rootedness in local community, its distinctive voice.

It's a loss that mirrors many larger changes in North America's alternative press. The alternative newsweeklies of the 1990s are not, in most cases, the adversarial underground papers of the '60s all grown up. (New Times, in this regard, is an interesting exception.) Nearly all were founded in the '70s and '80s as businesses designed to penetrate a market—unlike the undergrounds, which were political vehicles designed to empower a constituency.

In effect, the underground press, which died out with the end of the anti-Vietnam War movement, did the research and development for its softer, more depoliticized successors. The alternative weeklies that sprang up in college towns and cities in the '70s emphasized entertainment over politics and redeeming the system rather than replacing it. College students and affluent young adults have always been its core audience, and the makers of popular music, movies, fashion and food its core advertisers. As daily newspapers folded and downsized, the weeklies stepped into the vacuum and prospered.

By the early '80s virtually all alternative papers had discovered the final, key element in their commercial strategy: free distribution. Circulating for free means that advertising has become their exclusive source of revenue. It's a formula that has proved immensely profitable. Mark Hanzlik, the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies' (AAN) regional ad coordinator, estimates total revenues for the group's 105 members in the United States and Canada at $250 million. But it's also meant that the editorial content of many alternative papers is looking less "alternative" all the time, becoming in subtle degrees safer and softer, emphasizing more entertainment coverage and lifestyle journalism. Shopping guides, for example, are now mainstays in the pages of most large-scale alternative papers. Just as popular music has witnessed the meaning of "alternative" shift from an independent "do-it-yourself" insurgency to a marketing demographic, so has "alternative" become an increasingly mushy designation in journalism. Rebellious gestures stand in for political analysis; carping pieces about popular culture often supersede thoughtful essays and reviews. And even local political coverage—one of the alternative press' traditional strengths—becomes increasingly indistinguishable from that of mainstream competitors, concentrating on the electoral horse race and insiders' gossip. (Indeed, the distinc-

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tion between the alternative and mainstream press has blurred to the point that the daily *Toronto Star* now owns and operates its own weekly, the *Eye*.)

By now, this is a familiar critique of alternative weeklies. But what's only recently become apparent is that the same market forces behind the lucrative lifestyle turn have made alternative papers attractive targets for economic restructuring. In much the same way that the growing homogenization of other local news outlets helped spur the growth of the sprawling newspaper chains that now dominate most mainstream markets, America's alternative press gradually became ripe for franchising.

Enter New Times, Inc. The name itself suggests many of the ironies embedded in the alternative press. Founded simply as New Times, in Tempe, Ariz., in 1970, by a campus antiwar collective at Arizona State University, the name originated as a statement of hope, an affirmation of belief—an affirmation now neatly effaced by the summary "Inc." at the end.

New Times, Inc. is now a profit-making, privately held corporation. The company operates papers in Phoenix (*New Times*), Denver (*Westword*), Dallas (*The Observer*), Miami (*Miami New Times*), Houston (*Houston Press*) and San Francisco (*SF Weekly*), with plans to add more. Together, the papers have a free circulation of nearly 600,000. Still tiny compared to mega-publishers like the Gannett Corp. or Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorp, New Times is nevertheless a major player among the newsweeklies. In 1991, the most recent year for which figures are available, the company reported revenues of $16 million and profits of $2.5 million. (This was also a recessionary year when it had but three papers.) That same year, co-owner Jim Larkin told *Forbes* magazine that he saw no reason why the firm couldn't be a $100 million company someday.

New Times is not the only alternative chain, and it's not the first. Alternative newsweeklies have been stalking each other since at least 1972, when *Boston After Dark* publisher Stephen Mindich snapped up the rival *Cambridge Phoenix;* this was the origin of the *Boston Phoenix*, then as now one of the strongest alternative weeklies. The Advocate newspapers in New England, the City Paper cluster in the mid-Atlantic, the Midwestern Reader papers, the News & Review weeklies in northern California, and the jointly owned and high-profile *Village Voice* and *LA Weekly* are among the present-day alternative conglomerates. Twenty-five of the 105 members of the AAN are chain-owned. That's a smaller percentage than among U.S. dailies, but the market share of the weekly chains is growing.

More and more, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes by design, the AAN papers are replicating aspects of the mainstream media they were founded to compete against: white male-dominated hierarchical staffs, devotion to the profit motive, antipathy to a unionized workforce (if it's their own), the promotion of commodity fetishism, the care and feeding of advertising-friendly environments at the cost of political engagement.

In this respect, the history of the New Times group is a revealing microcosm of changes roiling the alternative press. It is a dramatic tale, complete with proxy fights, fistfights, frightening debt and shrewd leveraged buyouts. And it is a cautionary tale for alternative journalists.

It is also a tale that will have to be told here without direct comment from New Times' principal partners, Jim Larkin and Michael Lacey, who each own 40 percent of the company they co-founded. Larkin cut short a telephone interview by snapping, "I don't think *In These Times* is interested in how I make my living." Lacey was a man of even fewer words; he failed to reply to the messages left on his voice mail requesting an interview. But several dailies and admiring business magazines have won cooperation from Larkin and Lacey, so the decisive part they have played will not go unrecorded.

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The story begins in 1970, when Lacey, a construction worker's son from Newark, N.J., fell in with an antiwar group during the madness of Nixon's invasion of Cambodia. He helped hatch the fledgling *New Times* because, Lacey told a Phoenix magazine writer in 1990, "I just wanted to punch a few people in the fucking head." Larkin, a business-minded Phoenix native, joined Lacey, an editor and writer, a few years later. In 1973, to raise capital, New Times sold 38,000 shares for $1 each to left-liberal activists.

In the mid-'70s, the paper was still keeping the political faith in Goldwater country. But it was limping along with a circulation of 16,000, very little money and diminished energy. Nevertheless, Larkin and Lacey (who had just returned from a long sabbatical from the paper) sensed a business opportunity. They began pushing colleagues to retool the paper's contents, following a formula that was already working for other papers in college towns and big cities: a mix of hip, flip movie reviews, voluminous rock music coverage, restaurant reviews, risqué personals and exhaustive calendar listings. Copies were given away at music stores, laundromats, cafes, bars, bookstores and movie theaters.

The new *New Times* incorporated a lengthy cover story in most issues, keyed to Arizona politics or commerce. Some of the stories were hard-edged and distinguished. For example, the paper is still justly celebrated for its ongoing coverage of the Mob-ordered 1976 murder of Arizona investigative reporter Don Bolles.

In 1977, Larkin and Lacey made a bold move. Lining up proxy votes from other shareholders, the duo won a majority of the company's stock, gaining control of the paper. That same night, reports *Forbes*, "a flatbed truck hauled away the office furniture to Lacey and Larkin's new offices in Phoenix." A decade later, the partners bought out the other shareholders, taking the company private, and completing the circle from communal to managerial, nonprofit to commercial.

Gradually, the newly reorganized *Phoenix New Times* prospered, going over 100 pages weekly, two-thirds of them devoted to advertising. It also posed a serious editorial challenge to the city's dailies, the sleepy and hidebound *Arizona Republic* and *Phoenix Gazette*. By the early '80s, the increasingly confident Larkin and Lacey were ready to launch their acquisition and expansion plan. As Lacey later told the *Texas Monthly*: "We can take this anywhere there are warm, breathing bodies and IQs that can be measured."

In 1983, New Times made its first buy, swallowing Denver's weekly, *Westword*. In 1987, New Times bought its Miami outlet. In 1991, Dallas joined the chain, with Larkin and Lacey shelling out $3 million for the *Observer*. Two years later, they bought the *Houston Press* for $2.75 million. The partners got an additional boost when struggling second-place dailies folded in Dallas and Houston. Their aggressive expansion in the Lone Star State prompted the *Texas Monthly* to label Larkin and Lacey "mad-dog publishers from the desert."

This rapid expansion was financed by heavy borrowing. "At one point in 1988, the company had a staggering debt-to-equity ratio of 48 to 1. Strong cash flow has whittled that down to a still high but tolerable 4 to 1," *Forbes* reported in late 1991. By now, the New Times pattern of rolling into new cities, snapping up underperforming properties and remaking them in the corporate image was becoming well-established.

Larkin and Lacey, who appear to revel in the mad-dog image, put their mark on their property in other ways, too. In a widely reported incident, Lacey punched one of his Phoenix writers after the two exchanged words. Lacey has never denied the reports; indeed, he seems to thrive on the notoriety. "Larkin and I are people who say if you want to fight, fine," he boasted to the *Texas Monthly* last year. Lacey, the executive editor of all the New Times papers, went on to tell the *Monthly*: "I'm not particularly nice to deal with. If I read something that I think is stupid, or a writer has not explained enough, I let them know."

Two-fisted editing and devotion to the bottom line have made the New Times papers lucrative enterprises. *Forbes* estimated their annual return at 20 percent in 1991. These days, the flagship *Phoenix New Times* has a circulation of 140,000, making it one of the largest weeklies in North America. All copies are given away free; thus, revenues are not derived directly from readers with enough of a stake in the paper to buy a copy, but from advertisers with enough money to buy space. In this regard, the New Times papers are like nearly all their AAN colleagues; they are even more beholden to advertisers than are the local dailies they obsessively muckrake as unimaginative observers of—and interested players in—local business and politics.

Compromised or not, New Times is generally respected by executives at other alternative weeklies. Ray Hartmann, owner, publisher and editor of St. Louis' *Riverfront Times*, and a past president of AAN, praises the chain's papers. "I think they're very good," he says. "The quality of writing is extremely high, making them among the leading papers in our industry."

John Raeside, the editor and part owner of the Berkeley-based *East Bay Express*, echoes this view, adding: "The New Times papers are always very tough and focused on local politics. They have a very aggressive editorial policy." Raeside defends chain ownership, provided the owners are good journalists, because of the resources chains can pour into a small paper. Raeside allows "that it's probably true that a locally owned, independent press is more likely to be livelier." But, he continues, journalistic quality is also likely to be compromised "if the paper is financially weak and vulnerable." If a flush buyer comes along to rescue a struggling paper, Raeside contends, "that is to be applauded."

Which brings us back to the *SF Weekly*. The *Weekly*'s rising profile in a very politically minded market offers a useful template for testing the notion that enhanced

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resources translate into reinvigorated alternative journalism. Here, the early going under New Times ownership and management suggests, chain ownership is a mixed blessing at best.

As an independent, the *Weekly* was unquestionably smaller and weaker, reflecting its shoestring origins. The paper was founded in the early 1980s as a giveaway sheet of music calendar listings called, appropriately enough, the *Music Calendar* (later simply *Calendar*). It was launched as the *SF Weekly* in 1989, under co-founder Scott Price, himself a part-time musician.

Price and the *Weekly*, under a succession of editors, chased, but never quite caught, the weekly *San Francisco Bay Guardian*. An entrenched alternative founded in 1966 by Bruce Brugmann, who is still its co-owner, editor and publisher, the senior paper held onto its crusading liberal format while successfully enlarging its target audience from the Baby Boom to Generation X—thanks largely to the persistent prodding of the younger and hipper *Weekly*. By 1994, tired of the chase, Price sold out to Larkin and Lacey. The sale price for the marginally profitable paper, never officially disclosed, is estimated by former *Weekly* staffers to be in the $1.2 to $1.4 million range.

Larkin, Lacey & Co. quickly put their stamp on the *Weekly*. They redesigned the paper, making it look exactly like the other New Times properties, and forced out key staffers such as editor Andrew O'Hehir, senior editor Vince Bielski, special projects editor Karen Croft and entertainment columnist Michael Fox. The paper's editorial page was jettisoned entirely, along with its tradition of political endorsements.

Brought in to edit the new *SF Weekly* was Jack Shafer, editor of *City Paper* in Washington, D.C., where he attracted attention by penning a media insider column and publishing provocative liberal-bashing features such as "Why Do I Hate NPR? Let Me Count the Ways." Shafer proceeded to hire other out-of-towners for key jobs. Like hopscotching executives at Gannett, the new hires alighted in San Francisco, in hot pursuit of careers. If this is Tuesday, that must be the Golden Gate Bridge.

The *Weekly*'s only major, made-in-S.F. hire was cityside political columnist Larry Bush, a former *Village Voice* writer and a former aide to progressive Mayor Art Agnos. Bush stayed on the job only three months. Taking pains not to sound like a disgruntled ex-employee, Bush told *ITT* he was grateful for the chance to write every week, but found the remade *Weekly* indifferent to politics.

In a draft of a major feature on the 1995 San Francisco mayoral race, Bush says, the *Weekly* excised nearly all his references to Mayor Frank Jordan's wife, banking executive Wendy Paskin, on the grounds that she wasn't running for mayor. This, despite the fact that San Francisco political commentators are virtually unanimous in holding that Paskin is enormously influential in guiding her husband's career.

Bush says that he found the *Weekly*'s editors tone-deaf to politics in their adopted city, and intellectually disengaged in general—which he cites as one of the principal reasons for his resignation. "They're producing an airline magazine," declares Bush. "The paper could be produced and read anywhere."

For his part, Bielski says that he believes that the *Weekly*, consistent with New Times corporate culture, has taken on a libertarian coloration under Shafer. Says Bielski of Shafer: "He's very dismissive of anything that smacks of a social movement or a cause. They've probably not written a word on affirmative action. They're not addressing the controversial issues of the day. It's fearful journalism."

Not surprisingly, Shafer begs to differ. At last, Shafer submits, the *SF Weekly* is a real newspaper, covering the things that really matter, and it's doing so under the rubric of what he is pleased to call "literary journalism."

As an example of finely crafted, locally rooted writing, Shafer points to a recent cover story by new staff writer Ellen McGarrahan, headlined "Ship Happens," on safety violations by the massive ocean-going vessels that sail into San Francisco Bay. "It was written with all the dramatic structure of a tale well-told," Shafer says, "and it also points out [issues of tanker safety] from beginning to end."

Former *Weekly* columnist Bush agrees that the shipping story was a strong local piece, but argues that it was an exception in a long list of cover features about, among other topics, Beatle wife Linda McCartney's unpalatable line of frozen vegetarian entrées, orchid smuggling and the rising epidemic of hepatitis B. Most of these stories, Bush says, "would be good reads in any city, but didn't have a particular San Francisco character."

Maybe that's because the shots in San Francisco are being called by top Phoenix executives. Vince Bielski, observing that *New Times* executive editor Michael Lacey was much in evidence in the *Weekly*'s offices just after the sale of the paper, says the main criteria for employment at the *Weekly* "seemed to be the loyalty of the writers to the editor [Shafer], and the almost palpable loyalty of the editor to Lacey." Departed editor Andrew O'Hehir also recalls seeing Lacey, oozing machismo and self-regard, swaggering around the *Weekly*'s offices shortly after the purchase. "He likes to be confrontational," O'Hehir says. "He's always testing your manhood."

The significance of New Times, Inc.'s rise goes well beyond individual idiosyncracies or personal style, of course. New Times is, quite simply, the leading vehicle for the franchising of alternative newsweeklies. Its newspapers, while not unprofessional or bad per se, are nevertheless typically bland and virtually interchangeable. As a McDonald's burger tastes the same in Moscow, Beijing or Atlanta, the lookalike New Times papers hardly vary at all in editorial direction, design and outlook. Reading their polished but politically detacheded prose, scanning the pages of classifieds and personals (eight pages out of 72, in a recent *Weekly* issue), it's hard to find much that remains alternative

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about them. They are increasingly tepid tributaries of the mainstream press. Instead of serving as alternative papers, they settle for being additional papers.

For papers like the *SF Weekly*, the absorption into chains is a kind of death-in-life. The name remains; the body walks the Earth, but the soul is gone. The old *Weekly*, often preoccupied with arty posturing and giving good attitude, was not a perfect newspaper, but it reflected its origins and faithfully fulfilled its mission of, as O'Hehir puts it, "speaking to and from San Francisco subcultures and from them to the mainstream." Sadly, as the newest New Times clone, the *Weekly* has lost its specificity and its reason for being. It now reflects more of the sensibility of the Sagebrush Rebellion than the Barbary Coast.

Chain ownership is unlikely to stop there. As New Times president and chief operating officer Hal Smith told the journalism magazine *The Quill* last November: "As we've gotten bigger and a little more developed and sophisticated, we're starting to pick up the pace. Over the next few years, we expect start-ups and acquisitions at a much faster pace." Should New Times and other acquisitive chains have their way with independent alternatives, it won't be long before readers of once-alternative weeklies will be able to read airline publications without leaving the ground. ◀

David Armstrong, a media writer for the *San Francisco Examiner*, is the author of *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America* (South End Press, 1984).

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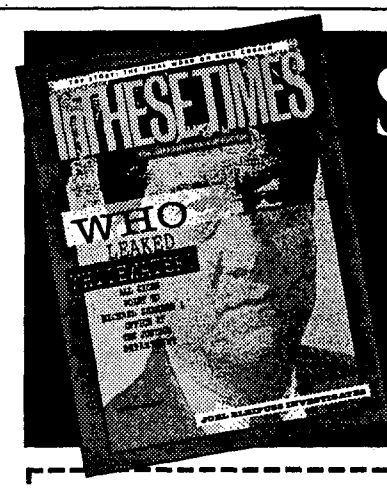
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BLACK AMERICA

A whiter shade of pale

Don't look for diversity in the left press.

By Salim Muwakkil

While covering the National Rainbow Coalition's (NRC) first convention in April 1986, I met the only other black journalists then working for left-leaning U.S. publications. Francis Beale was a reporter for the socialist weekly *Frontline* and Akinshiju Ola wrote for the venerable *Guardian*. Although I was familiar with their work, it was our first meeting. We immediately began comparing notes on life as African-American reporters in the left press, and our experiences were remarkably similar.

We talked about how some of our most important concerns—such as Afrocentric curricula and issues of African politics—were often devalued by editors lacking an understanding of our stories' racial context. But we also agreed that our editors allowed us greater editorial freedom than was probably available anywhere else. We discussed the difficulty of attracting African-Americans into the ranks of the left, and marveled at the fledgling NRC's ability to pull such a racially diverse crowd to its first confab.

The NRC was spawned by the Rev. Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign, and the '86 convention was the first attempt to institutionalize the spirit provoked by his audacious run. An overlooked feature of Jackson's candidacy was its effect on newsrooms in both the mainstream and left media. Editors wanted insightful coverage of this brash, black candidate, and they took affirmative action to get it.

By covering Jackson, black reporters in the commercial media were elevated to national prominence, and those in the left press also gained greater visibility. But even with the impetus provided by Jackson's political crusade, black writers were still seldom published in most left publications. My discussions with Beale and Ola focused on possible strategies to alter that pattern. Of course, since then left-leaning publications have been steadily declining; in fact, both the *Guardian* and *Frontline* are gone.

That 1986 conversation came to mind as I read James Ledbetter's two-part piece about media racism in the *Village Voice*'s July 25 and August 1 editions. Headlined, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Journalism," Ledbetter's piece lays bare the gap between liberal pretensions and the segregated realities of hiring at high-profile left publications. More disturbingly, he amplifies findings that were first disclosed by Katha Pollitt in a much-noted March 13 *Nation* column exposing left-leaning publications as the most segregated.

Ledbetter writes that in 13 years *The Nation* has employed two non-white editorial staffers and that none remain; *The Utne Reader* and *The New York Review of Books* employ none; *The Progressive*, *Mother Jones* and *In These Times*, one each. Granted, the left-leaning publications selected in the survey offer a limited sample (for example, magazines such as *Crosscurrents*, *Third Force* and *The Neighborhood Works* are omitted), but hiring patterns across the entire spectrum are similar.

If the left press has an ideological commitment to racial equality, why isn't it reflected in its workforce? If, as Pollitt puns, "the personnel is political," then what does that say about the racial politics of the progressive media?

"The best face you can put on the problems of segregation in the progressive press is the economic argument," said Ledbetter in a recent interview. "In the last 10 years at least, these publications have been either stagnant or in decline. When you're in an industry that's in a state of decline you're not likely to hire people. But that's the best face."

While conceding the economic argument, Ledbetter insists that cultural factors are perhaps more important. There is a

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certain intellectual cliquishness and "hermeticism" in the white progressive media that has to be addressed, he says. The left practices a kind of intellectual one-upsmanship that's limited to a very narrow range of references: "Gramsci, Foucault, Jameson, Adorno and all that."

Ledbetter is correct about the left's cultural insularity. Thinkers that challenge the orthodoxies of the moment find credibility hard to come by in the dwindling precincts of the left. Because of its secular and universalist biases, the white left tends to devalue the work of thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Harold Cruse whose focus often includes religious influences and questions of black identity. And because of an ideological hostility to nationalism, the left is even more dismissive of influential black nationalist intellectuals like Maulana Karenga and Molefi Asante.

Ledbetter says reaction to his piece mostly has been positive. "I've received more response to that piece than to anything else I've written for the *Voice*," he says. "It's probably just a matter of timing. With the debate about affirmative action and other race-based arguments going on, and with the progressive press largely silent on the issue, this piece just came at the right time."

The time may be right, but the issue is timeless: How can African-Americans expect mainstream America to allow them greater access if progressive America doesn't? Much of Ledbetter's reasoning resonates with what three black journalists concluded at the first NRC convention in 1986. Harold Cruse examined many of the same issues in his 1967 book *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, and he concluded then that blacks would be better served by adopting a more nationalistic posture.

"No one can much blame Negro writers for drifting leftward in culture and politics at some point in their individual careers," Cruse wrote. "But once they do, too many either become captives for the balance of their intellectual lives, or else are ultimately disillusioned (if not expelled) and drift into a negative kind of isolation or exile. Few of them ever seem to learn anything positive about reality from this experience." Rather, he argued, the sojourn with the left "has retarded and smothered the Negro's intellectual and political development." And he offered an antidote: "The path to more knowledge for the Negro intellectual is through cultural nationalism."

Some African-American activists have taken Cruse's message to heart and avoid all involvement with left causes, adopting a generally conservative commitment to black self-improvement and self-reliance. Others simply focus most of their organizing energies on more immediate problems within the black community. Socialized in the culture of American apartheid, many blacks perceive the left press as just another white institution that is hostile or, at best, unconcerned with their well-being. For example, in my varied attempts to enlist black writers for *In These Times*, I've frequently been rebuffed because of their negative perception of the left press. Unfortunately, that perception sometimes is accurate.

But despite their shortcomings, the progressive media still offer African-Americans an ideal venue for rigorous analysis. Except for upstart publications like *Emerge*, feisty but underfunded newspapers like Brooklyn's *City Sun*, and the Nation of Islam's (NOI) house organ, *The Final Call*, the black press provides little room for the kind of serious discussion appropriate for the times.

With the demise of the socialist bloc and the absence of any compelling ideological alternatives, nationalist politics has filled the void. Minister Louis Farrakhan is widely regarded as black America's most respected leader, according to recent polls. Because some of Farrakhan's message is clothed in classic anti-Semitism and since progressive whites are disproportionately Jewish, many of those influenced by the NOI leader are wary of associations with the left.

Cruse also expressed concerns about ties between blacks and Jews. He argued that the establishment of Israel reinforced a Jewish nationalism that would undermine black nationalist efforts. Because Cruse considered the radical left in America an essentially Jewish movement, he believed that black involvement with left causes was doomed to fail.

The Black Power era that followed hard on the heels of Cruse's book changed things considerably. Jews were rudely ejected from positions of influence within many of the major black organizations (particularly the ones targeting younger African-Americans, such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC) and have yet to return. Farrakhan's occasional expressions of anti-Semitism play on these tensions, and his growing esteem within the black community contributes to the widening gap between white and black progressives. All of which tends to push black activist writers away from the left press.

And other factors may be just as inhibiting. James Weinstein, *ITT*'s publisher and editor, believes there are several reasons why African-Americans rarely work for the left press. "In the first place," he says, "a black person with the education and sophistication to write for us can usually get paid much more by writing for other people." Weinstein also argues that the rise of identity politics has contributed to the problem. "Since there is no coherent left, most minority journalists who are concerned about politics would rather write for their own publications," he says.

Weinstein also blames the absence of a left-oriented social movement for the lack of integration. Without an overall left movement, he says, "we tend to attract fewer and fewer blacks. And that's understandable. Why should blacks be attracted to a bunch of argumentative white intellectuals without any political direction or chance of effecting change?"

But if this country's progressive forces stand any chance of halting the right-wing juggernaut now careening across the political landscape we will need all the common ground we can get; common ground means compromise. If Weinstein's argumentative white progressives are at a political impasse, maybe they should consider lending their support to the march of 1 million black men on Washington on October 16. Then at least they would need black reporters to cover it. ◄

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LABOR

Truck of evil

A corrupt Congress and a union-busting trucking company are gutting enforcement of federal labor law.

By David Moberg

Imagine a small, all-American city with a dark, secret scandal. There's a shadowy Network in town, a group of flagrant violators of the law. There's also a new sheriff, who has finally been making arrests. But the Network has paid off the new city council majority, who in any case are its friends.

The council members contact the sheriff and tell him to back off the case. When he refuses, they retaliate by slashing the budget of his overworked office, cutting his deputies, and telling the sheriff that he can't spend any money on the case. Pretty corrupt, no?

Welcome to the 104th Congress. This fable tells—too simply but not unfairly—what happened this summer as the House Republicans pushed through a 30 percent cut in the budget of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), along with restrictions on what the board can do to protect workers.

For the Network, substitute Union Pacific's Overnite Transportation trucking division, the nation's fourth-largest shipper of less-than-truckload freight and the largest non-union trucking company. Since late last year many Overnite workers have been trying to get the company to recognize the Teamsters as their bargaining agent. In their fight against the union, Overnite officials, including President Jim Douglas, have accumulated more than 200 charges of unfair labor practices and 40 official NLRB complaints. They stand accused of such illegal acts as firing James Mickel, a former trucking company manager turned driver and union supporter, for questioning the safety of an old truck he was assigned to drive. They apparently broke the law repeatedly, threatening to fire or discipline pro-union workers and to close facilities if workers voted for the union, offering pay raises to discourage pro-union votes (and discriminating in pay against pro-union units), and prohibiting legitimate union activity, like wearing shirts and buttons with union messages.

NLRB General Counsel Fred Feinstein asked the federal courts to issue an injunction against Overnite's illegal acts under section 10(j) of the National Labor Relations Act. Injunctions add some punch and speed to an often slow and impotent enforcement procedure, and since he first took office, Feinstein has encouraged regional officials to request them when appropriate (as the NLRB did to resolve the Major League Baseball strike). Feinstein has filed injunctions at roughly double the rate of the Reagan-Bush years. But even after this increase, the NLRB has sought injunctions in only 3 percent of its unfair labor practice cases.

"We've never sought a nationwide injunction before [the Overnite case]," NLRB Chairman William Gould says. "But I found that there was reasonable cause to believe that hallmark violations of the law had been engaged in. They had [committed] just about every violation in the textbook."

Overnite eventually agreed to a settlement without an injunction. It will open managers to contempt charges if they violate worker rights and will give workers who were wronged some redress, including back pay. Feinstein is also asking the board to order Overnite to recognize and bargain with the Teamsters at about 17 terminals where gross violations of the law are likely to have tipped the elections against the union. In another 10 cases new elections will likely be held. Before the agreement, workers voted for a union in 13 elections and against the union in 27, but most of those union defeats will be invalidated. Counting elections and bargaining orders, the Teamsters will represent about 3,100 of 10,000 potential Overnite union members. The organizing drive continues—as do management violations, Teamsters say.

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The board's actions were a blow to Overnite and a boost to workers, but Overnite has powerful friends. In the last election cycle, Union Pacific's political action committee, the fifth-largest transportation PAC, gave members of Congress $636,803, 70 percent of which went to Republicans. When the board was deciding whether to approve Feinstein's request to get an injunction, more than a dozen members of Congress, mainly Republicans, wrote nearly identical letters threatening to cut the NLRB budget in the upcoming House appropriations bill if the board approved the injunction request. Soon afterward, Union Pacific made large contributions to several letter writers.

When the board did approve the pursuit of a nationwide injunction, Arkansas Republican and small-business owner Jay Dickey doubled the proposed cut in the NLRB budget to 30 percent, much to the chagrin of Republican subcommittee chairman John Porter. With a Union Pacific lobbyist passing notes to Republicans in a late-night session during which few outsiders were in the room, the subcommittee also passed a rider requiring that four out of five NLRB members must vote for a 10(j) injunction. Since by tradition, only three of the five are from the president's party, Republican board members could veto any future injunction.

The corrupt city analogy also fits the Republican attacks on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The lead candidate for the Network in this story is United Parcel Service. A repeated safety-law violator whose workers are vulnerable to injuries from badly designed workplaces, UPS led the successful fight to deny OSHA money to develop ergonomic standards for work, even though repetitive trauma injuries account for one-third of all workplace injuries that result in employees losing work time. Not coincidentally, UPS also has the nation's biggest PAC (giving $2.6 million in the past two years) and has employed Dorothy Strunk, Bush's former acting director of OSHA, as its chief lobbyist.

To grasp the changes wrought in OSHA, imagine that last year's crime bill earmarked significant new spending to help petty criminals comply voluntarily with the law, while helping them evade actual enforcement by slashing local police forces 33 percent. At OSHA, Republicans increased "compliance assistance," or aid to employers, by one-fifth but cut federal enforcement by one-third, completely reversing through appropriations the intent of Congress when it founded the agency 25 years ago.

If these measures survive the Senate and are not vetoed, more workers will be injured or killed every year. Most people don't think of work safety or union organizing as matters of law enforcement. But each year nearly 60,000 people die of workplace accidents and illnesses, and 7 million are injured—a toll far greater than that tallied by street criminals.

Most attention has been focused on the big Republican cuts in programs that redistribute tax dollars for social ends, such as job training or summer youth jobs. Yet by denying many workers their rights at work, the attacks on OSHA and the NLRB redistribute power, in the workplace as well as society, to employers.

The NLRB is the only agency charged with enforcing the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), but it is a weak cop and court system. As NLRB historian and Cornell professor James Gross notes, all the board can do is tell labor and management to "be fair." Gross argues that conservatives ought to love the arrangement, which involves minimal dictates from the government. "But some conservatives are conservative only in wanting unilateral employer control," he observes. "That's dangerous."

Yet the purpose of U.S. labor law, enunciated in the NLRA and reaffirmed by a Republican Congress in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, "is to encourage collective bargaining," Gross says. "In order to have collective bargaining, you need labor organizations that are truly independent of control by employers." Likewise, as the Supreme Court has affirmed, OSHA states that workplaces should be safe, even if that imposes costs on employers.

Under the guise of balancing the budget—plus paying for tax cuts for the wealthy and increased military spending—the House cut NLRB and OSHA funding, even though their appropriations are too small to be relevant to budget balancing. Furthermore, Feinstein points out, "With some agencies, if you cut the budget, you shrink what they do. You cut us, [and] we still have the same caseload—it just takes us a whole lot longer to do it." Even the lesser cut of 15 percent, as originally proposed, would be "devastating," he adds.

The NLRB budget had already been cut by one-third since 1980, but Gould and Feinstein have made the overworked board more efficient and encouraged faster settlement of cases. They wanted to eliminate the lengthy delays in roughly 20 to 40 percent of election requests by workers, a move that would take away employers' huge advantage in their battle against unionization. But the Republican cuts would close half the NLRB field offices, nearly tripling the backlogs in unfair labor practice cases and increasing the median time to investigate such cases from 30 days to six months.

"What they're doing will cripple our ability to operate effectively," Gould says. "People who look to our agency and the law for prompt and effective enforcement of national labor policy will be very discouraged. I said to the House Appropriations Subcommittee in February that the only alternative for workers would be the use of self-help in some form." "Self-help" could mean increased use of strikes, civil disobedience and other disruptive actions.

Some management lawyers think the NLRB is fair and useful because it stabilizes labor relations, argues an NLRB official who asked not to be named. These attorneys have been reluctant to defend the board for fear of retaliation from business lobbyists, who are driven as much by small-business groups as by large corporations involved in long strikes with sanctions from the administration or the NLRB,

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such as Bridgestone and Caterpillar.

The cuts would reverse the progress the board has made in discouraging businesses from breaking labor law. "What we've heard—and I hope it's true—is that our willingness to consider injunctions has had a deterrent effect, just what you hope any statutory scheme would do," Feinstein says. "People will think twice before violating the law because relief will be forthcoming in a more appropriate time frame."

The catalog of anti-labor initiatives in the House appropriations bill is impressive. Besides limiting NLRB injunctions, the bill would prohibit the board from acting on any "salting" cases, which involve union workers—known as "salts"—who apply for jobs at non-union workplaces. Especially in the building trades, union workers have increasingly applied for jobs at non-union contractors, often making their union sympathies clear. If hired, the salts organize; if refused, they file charges of illegal discrimination. Back-pay penalties give organizers leverage with employers or at least impose extra costs on non-union operators. Though the Bush-era board strongly affirmed that "salting" was protected, one federal appeals court decided last year, in a case now pending before the Supreme Court, that pro-union workers were "disloyal" and thus not protected as employees.

House Republicans also told the Labor Department it couldn't spend money to enforce President Clinton's executive order banning federal contractors from using permanent replacement workers during strikes. They also cut by one-fourth the budget for the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the government's main safety research and training agency, and blocked enforcement of a new safety standard for protection against falls that the homebuilding industry opposed.

In many ways, the slashed OSHA and NIOSH budgets are preludes to a bill introduced by North Carolina Republican and plastic-packaging company owner Cass Ballenger. His bill would greatly restrict federal safety enforcement, reduce or eliminate the rights of workers or unions to file safety complaints, create broad new exemptions from inspection (such as permitting employers simply to claim they've complied with the law), create new anti-regulation red tape, and eliminate NIOSH. Ballenger candidly told the *Washington Post* that he drummed up business contributions to Republicans with the promise of dismantling OSHA.

Clinton and congressional Republicans appear headed for a showdown on the appropriations bill, though for reasons other than these labor provisions. But the president and his party would do well politically to emphasize how scandalously business and the Republicans have teamed up to thumb their noses at the law and the rights and safety of all working people. It's a winning issue, which could attract precisely the swing voters Clinton and the Democrats need. They could put themselves squarely on the side of greater rights, power and protection for workers and against the lawlessness of the most renegade businesses and their Republican servants in Congress. ◀

Editorial

Continued from page 2

alliance with the Bosnian government. This anti-Serb alliance on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina was simultaneously inserted into a broader "Croatian-Bosnian Federation" hammered out of a consensus between Croatian President Tudjman and Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegovic.

While the world was being convinced that "Greater Serbia" was the cause of all evil in the Balkans, the United States was sponsoring a reconstitution of the "Greater Croatia" set up by the Nazis and run by the murderous Ustashe regime during World War II. The memory of that Croatian state—which carried out the mass liquidation of Serbs (as well as Jews and Gypsies)—remains the main source of Serb fears of being reduced to minority status in either Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, many Serbs within Bosnia have been staunch defenders of the multi-ethnic ideal of Sarajevo against the Serb chauvinism of Radovan Karadzic. The widespread sympathy in the West for Bosnia-Herzegovina has been based on rejection of "ethnic cleansing" and sympathy for the ideal of a multi-ethnic society. This was an ideal the West failed to defend, however, in the case of Yugoslavia itself. By yielding to German pressure to recognize the unnegotiated secession of a nationalist Croatia, the West opened a Pandora's box that is still full of nasty surprises.

The only way to close it has always been, and still is, a clear policy aimed at reconciliation, negotiations and the active encouragement of wise, non-nationalist political leaders within all parts of the former Yugoslavia.

The evil of nationalism cannot be eradicated by arming one nationalism against another. It is urgent for the United States to develop a policy, in conjunction with its European allies—and not solely with Germany—that offers hope of a peaceful and democratic life together to all the peoples of the Balkans.

—Diana Johnstone

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HEALTH

Message in a bottle

An advertising blitz by the makers of infant formula is misleading American mothers and threatening the health of their children.

By Linda Baker

Ever since my son was born three months ago, I have been bombarded with promotional literature touting the wonders of infant formula. The brochures—peddling everything from Carnation's Good Start to Ross Products' Similac—insist that "breast milk is best." But this not-very-heartfelt disclaimer does little to dilute the companies' dominant message: Breast-feeding is inconvenient, embarrassing in social situations and quite possibly unnecessary. So relentless are the marketing strategies that any but the most ardent La Leche League disciple is forced to think twice before putting a baby to her breast.

During my initial post-partum weeks, I received more than $50 in redeemable checks for various brands of formula. Along with coupons, Gerber mailed a parenting guide, while Ross Labs sent a case of 24 eight-ounce cans—a two-week supply—of ready-to-serve formula. But the prize for marketing savvy goes to Mead Johnson, producer of Enfamil, which sent a photo of a baby guzzling formula and a caption reading "a perfect 8 lbs., 3 ounces"—the precise birth weight of my son. Even I, sophisticated consumer that I am, melted momentarily at that one. "Yes, it is a perfect weight, isn't it?" I whispered adoringly to my ideally proportioned child.

These pitches may seem like relatively harmless instances of overzealous advertising. But many medical authorities warn that the domestic marketing by formula makers, which has expanded rapidly in recent years, is misleading American women about the financial and medical costs of formula feeding—and, as a result, is seriously threatening the health of their babies.

The news that infant formula poses a danger to American children may come as a surprise to readers weaned on the Nestlé boycotts that began in 1977—when the Swiss multinational was attacked for aggressively marketing formula in developing countries. Then, Nestlé's critics warned that women in poor countries were mixing their formula with contaminated water, leading to millions of infant illnesses and deaths. Consequently, many Americans assume that problems with infant formula occur only in poor nations with tainted water supplies.

Fewer realize, however, that infant formula causes significant health problems in stable, First World countries as well. In the United States, bottle-fed babies are more likely than breast-fed babies to contract a variety of illnesses, including ear infections, diarrhea, pneumonia, spinal meningitis and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Studies by Dr. Miriam Labbok, director of the breast-feeding division at Georgetown University Medical Center, suggest that if all U.S. newborns were breast-fed for at least 12 weeks, the nation would save between $2 billion and $4 billion annually in health care costs. (Her analysis factored in the cost of formula as well as the incidence of formula-related illnesses.)

"Just because babies don't die in the dramatic numbers that they do in developing countries, or just because we may have a health care system that can rescue babies that get dysentery or gastrointestinitis, doesn't mean it isn't a critical health problem in this country," says Karlyn Sturmer, the U.S. representative for the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN). "In this country, the problem is especially critical for lower-income families who don't have access to good health care: If they mix their formula incorrectly, if they dilute it to make it last longer, or if they have a poor water supply, their babies get sick and can die."

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This barrage of direct advertising by formula companies is relatively new. Until a few years ago, infant formula was marketed solely as a pharmaceutical product; salespeople called on pediatricians, who in turn recommended brands to new mothers. But this marketing practice changed in 1992, when the Federal Trade Commission cited Abbott-Ross, Mead Johnson and Wyeth—three of the biggest formula manufacturers—for price fixing and other anti-competitive practices. Between 1982 and 1992, collusion by these companies caused formula retail prices to more than double—by contrast, whole milk prices rose less than 30 percent during the same period. The result of the federal antitrust action was a free-for-all among manufacturers in the $3 billion-a-year infant formula industry. In the war for new mothers, direct mail, new-baby clubs, and TV and print advertising are the indispensable ammunition.

Of course, mass marketing is only one arm of the formula distribution network. Pharmaceutical companies offer doctors and hospitals money, equipment and other perks in exchange for promoting bottle feeding. For its part, the U.S. government provides formula to an incredible 40 percent of all American babies through the Women, Infants and Children program (WIC) at a cost of $1.7 billion each year. Today, although everyone seems to agree that breast milk *is* best, the most powerful forces in the country are promoting artificial feeding for infants.

Until a slight rise last year, breast-feeding had been on the decline in the United States since 1984. In 1993, just over 50 percent of all new mothers breast-fed at the hospital; six months later, only 19 percent still were giving their babies any breast milk. The World Health Organization (WHO), among other authorities, recommends that babies be exclusively breast-fed for six months and that breast milk continue as a part of a baby's diet until at least the beginning of the second year.



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Of course, the reasons women choose not to breast-feed in the United States are complex. Returning to work deters many mothers from breast-feeding, and thanks to this country's puritanical streak, many women still find breast-feeding in public embarrassing. And a review of the marketing literature from formula makers suggests that they are also playing a role in undermining breast feeding among mothers.

The direct-mail materials, for example, link optimum infant development to intake of breast-milk substitutes. "Dear Linda," began a typically "personal" letter I received from Susan Finn, "Ph.D.," director of nutrition services at Ross. The letter, commemorating my son's 3-month milestone, said: "Your baby is growing—maybe faster than you can believe. But proper growth and development depends on the right nutritional balance. Use the enclosed checks to save on Similac With Iron—*the first choice* formula of more physicians."

In response to a toll-free consumer inquiry, a Ross representative told me that the company mails its 24-can Similac starter pack "as close to the baby's birthdate as possible." This timing is not coincidental. Formula companies target women during periods of maximum anxiety about their ability to nourish their babies. As Gary L. Freed writes in a recent issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, formula marketing reaches its high-water mark at "predetermined, difficult times of the breast-feeding process: initiation and growth spurts."

Concern about an inadequate milk supply—a fear formula companies exploit through deceptive advertising—is one of the main reasons women stop breast-feeding. Nancy Masaitis, director of the mother-baby program at Bess Kaiser Hospital in Portland, Ore., tells of a laminated handout that some of the companies distribute to clinics. "It says right on it that a couple of bottles of formula a day keeps a good milk supply. That is completely false. Supplementing with formula, especially in the early months, is what reduces a mother's milk."

One of the industry's more unconscionable advertising strategies is to target low-income mothers. According to Ross' 1992 "Mother's Survey," only 35 percent of mothers living in households with an annual income of less than $10,000 have *ever* breast-fed their infants. Masaitis says that poor women "begin using [formula] because they're given free samples." By the time they use up all the coupons, she says, "their milk has dried up and they're forced to buy a product they can't afford." Saddled with the roughly $600 yearly cost of formula per child, these women have become, one might say, addicted to infant formula.

The formula makers I contacted were reluctant to comment on the ethics of their marketing practices. Citing "proprietary interests," Mead Johnson public relations director Pete Paradossi declined to discuss the philosophy behind the company's advertising campaigns. Ross spokeswoman Suzanne Priori also refused to comment for this article.

In general, formula companies argue that advertising and

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distributing free samples only affect a woman's choice of brands and not the basic decision to breast-feed. However, given that neither the private nor public sector spends much money promoting the health benefits of breast milk, it's clear that the free market offers women little genuine choice. "There is no one out there paying megabucks to [advertise] breast-feeding," says Pam Hellings, a registered nurse and the director of the Breastfeeding Service at Oregon Health Sciences University in Portland. "If it were a fair world, we would market both and let the public take its pick."

The U.S. government only makes matters worse by tacitly endorsing the use of infant formula. Although the Department of Health and Human Services has said it hopes to increase the nation's breast-feeding rate to 75 percent by the year 2000, its WIC subsidies to poor women for infant formula make the government the single largest purchaser of infant formula in the world. Not surprisingly, WIC mothers are less likely to breast-feed than other American women.

If the actions of the government seem contradictory, the American medical community—which most mothers rely on for child-care advice—is downright schizophrenic. Physicians pay lip service to the notion that "breast milk is best" while colluding with formula companies to encourage artificial feeding. Although lactation consultants and breast-pumping seminars are now *de rigueur* at most hospitals, 90 percent of all breast-feeding materials distributed to new mothers in hospitals are produced by formula companies. Numerous studies indicate that women who receive hospital discharge packs—generally, a diaper bag filled with infant formula samples and/or coupons, pacifiers, stuffed animals and literature on baby care—are less likely to breast-feed. The discharge packs are successful precisely because they imply a medical endorsement of formula feeding, or at the very least, the idea that this decision is not really an important medical concern.

In return for operating as middlemen for the formula industry, doctors and hospitals receive perks ranging from free medical bags and conference sponsorships to unlimited supplies of free formula. Last winter, for example, Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago received unlimited free formula, as well as $210,000, in exchange for granting brand exclusivity to Mead Johnson. The contract specified that Northwestern Memorial give all new mothers discharge packs containing Mead Johnson formula samples and coupons.

The recent increase in direct advertising seems likely to strengthen the medical profession's ties to the formula industry. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), for example, has historically opposed advertising breast-milk substitutes directly to consumers. Recently, however, the organization decided to accept funding from companies whose marketing practices run counter to that policy. "We've sort of flip-flopped on that," acknowledges Michael Copeland, public relations director for the AAP. "At one point we were pretty high and mighty about refusing to accept donations from anyone who advertised directly to the public. We still reserve the right to speak out against any practices that are deleterious to breast-feeding, but we removed that restriction about not taking money."

The change in the AAP's policy, says Copeland, stems from the current boom in direct-mail advertising. At this point, to refuse funding from companies that advertise to the public would be tantamount to cutting off relations with virtually the entire formula industry. The AAP receives grants from the industry totaling more than $1 million. It is not alone: Other medical groups funded by the formula industry include the American Medical Association, the American Dietetic Association and the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses.

Recent efforts to regulate infant formula marketing in the United States have met with little success. UNICEF and WHO have launched a global program called the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), which offers certification to hospitals that promote breast-feeding and discourage formula company marketing. But, here, too, the marketers of formula seem poised to dictate a major policy change. An "Expert Working Group," funded by the Department of Health and Human Services to study domestic application of the BFHI, has recommended eliminating the requirement that hospitals buy their own breast-milk substitutes. This would allow manufacturers to continue marketing their products to hospitals. As IBFAN's Sturmer notes, "It's a BFHI gutted of its most essential element: the banning of free supplies and samples."

U.S. officials are also evading WHO efforts to regulate formula distribution. Last year, the United States went on record for the first time in support of the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes—which prohibits the advertising of formulas and the direct and indirect distribution of free samples of milk to mothers and health workers. But State Department delegates made clear that the government has no intention of applying the code domestically.

Meanwhile, the U.S. formula market grew by an unprecedented 7.8 percent in the first quarter of 1995, according to a recent article in *Advertising Age*. Expanding their efforts to reach consumers, Ross and Mead Johnson have created a line of follow-up toddler milks, which they now advertise on television. "After the bottle, before the milk," announces the voice-over for Enfamil's Next Step toddler formula, thus solidifying an infant-to-preschool feeding pattern that circumvents the breast entirely.

Clearly, formula makers will continue to hold health officials in their thrall unless the public can summon the same sense of outrage that resulted in the Nestlé boycotts. And now that formula companies are shifting their promotional efforts to the mass media, infant health will be increasingly at the mercy of the marketplace. "People should know," says Sturmer, "that formula marketers are like tobacco companies—unethical and harmful." ◀

Linda Baker is a freelance writer in Portland, Ore.

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ENVIRONMENT

The sky's the limit

Congress declares war on the ozone layer.

By Christian Parenti

With House Republicans on the deregulation warpath, apparently no environmental protection is sacred—not even the Montreal Protocol, the international agreement regulating the industrial chemicals that are destroying the Earth's protective stratospheric ozone layer.

At ground level, ozone contributes to smog and irritates the lungs, but high in the stratosphere it filters out the sun's deadly ultraviolet-B radiation (UVB). The main chemical culprits are chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrofluorocarbons (HCFCs), which have been used as refrigerants, propellants in styrofoam manufacture and rinsing solutions for computer circuit boards. Recently, scientists have discovered that the fungicide and fumigant methyl bromide is also contributing to ozone destruction. And now, just as much of the industrialized world is reaching a consensus for more stringent ozone protection, powerful fruit growers in Florida and California are pressing Congress to deregulate the use of methyl bromide. (The chemical is currently slated to be phased out of use, and banned entirely by 2001.)

The backlash could not come at a worse time. Last spring, stratospheric ozone levels over the United States decreased 15 to 20 percent from levels recorded in 1979, the first year the ozone layer was measured. This data, compiled by the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), was recently corroborated by the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva. Now both poles of the Earth are especially vulnerable to atmospheric deterioration during the spring, when the rate of depletion is accelerated. Chlorine molecules from CFCs use the surfaces of tiny ice particles in the polar stratosphere to smash apart the three oxygen molecules that make up ozone. While some of this springtime damage is repaired naturally every year, most of it is not, and the sun's rays become more and more poisonous as the damage mounts.

Already scientists at the AT&T Bell Laboratories and the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry have shown that the increased amount of UVB reaching the Earth's surface is killing phytoplankton (a key part of the marine food chain), coral reefs, rainbow trout, white pines, hardwoods, wheat and soybeans. UVB also wreaks havoc on the human immune system, according to Dr. Edward DeFabo of George Washington University Medical Center. "The decrease in ozone is real, the increase in UVB is real, and the associated damage is real," says Peter Hoffman, a faculty researcher at the University of Oregon. "Already we're seeing UVB-sensitive species of frogs and toads go extinct—even in completely pristine environments like the tropical cloud forest national parks of Puerto Rico, where the golden frog has just died out. But most frightening," says Hoffman, "is the damage to plants. UVB's effects on humans can be coped with—you stay out of the sun. But when crop yields start declining worldwide, which they may already be doing, we will be facing real problems."

At the heart of the GOP drive to roll back ozone regulations are several bills that would mangle or completely annul Title VI of the 1990 Clean Air Act. Title VI regulates ozone-depleting CFCs and their less harmful replacements, HCFCs, as well as the less common but powerfully destructive methyl bromide, which has been linked to cancer and birth defects among farmworkers.

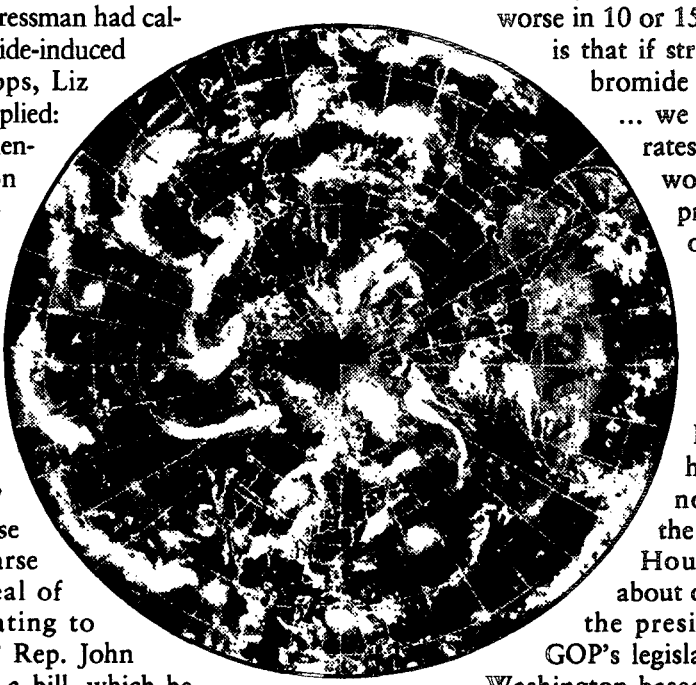
Rep. Dan Miller (R-FL) is leading the charge against

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methyl bromide regulation. Florida agribusiness ranks as the nation's No. 1 user of bromide; California tomato and strawberry growers are second. Despite the availability of ozone-friendly—but more labor-intensive—alternatives, Miller maintains that American business will be severely hurt if methyl bromide use is further restricted or banned. "A unilateral phaseout by the United States," said Miller in a recent statement, "will only shift production to countries that permit methyl bromide use. Since ozone depletion is a global problem, shifting production abroad will neither reduce the total amount of methyl bromide released nor improve the environment. The only thing it will do is cost America jobs."

According to environmental activists, Miller's logic and facts are wrong. "The more we delay a U.S. ban on methyl bromide, the more likely it is that the developing world will begin to use it," says Kalee Kreider of the Washington-based group Ozone Action. "In most developing nations," says Kreider, "bromide is only used in the storage and shipping of fruit. They don't use it in the fields [because] it's a new, expensive, very dangerous chemical. But the more [methyl bromide] is produced and sold in the U.S., the cheaper it will be internationally, and soon the whole planet will be hooked."

But such considerations don't trouble the crusaders in Congress. Asked whether the congressman had calculated the potential costs of bromide-induced ozone depletion on Florida crops, Liz Tobias, Miller's press secretary, replied: "Congressman Miller is not a scientist. He takes no position on whether bromide hurts the ozone [layer]. He just wants things to be cost-effective."



More ominous than Miller's draft bill are several bills already proposed by House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-TX). From the man who recently called the Environmental Protection Agency "the Gestapo" comes the bluntly phrased House Resolution 475, which in a sparse seven lines proposes the "repeal of Clean Air Act provisions relating to stratospheric ozone protection." Rep. John Doolittle (R-CA) is also drafting a bill, which he plans to introduce after the recess, that would completely deregulate the use and production of CFCs. If passed, either bill would put U.S. law in conflict with the Montreal Protocol.

"Unlike most international agreements," says Ozone Action's Kreider, "the Montreal Protocol has been effective. The participating nations have more or less been on track, meeting their agreed-upon reduction targets. But if the U.S. pulls out because of DeLay's bill, the whole thing will go to pieces."

Another DeLay bill has already been approved as part of this year's House appropriations. On July 26, the House voted to cut funding for the NOAA, which is responsible for some of the world's most accurate stratospheric ozone monitoring. The NOAA's budget is now scheduled to fall from $2 billion to $1.78 billion. If the current appropriations are approved by the Senate in September, the NOAA's spending on the study of climactic change—which includes ozone monitoring—will suffer a 42 percent funding cut. "Every day, twice a day, the NOAA launches weather balloons that measure, among other things, stratospheric ozone levels," says Kevin Gurney, a senior scientist at the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research in Washington, D.C. "These plans to cut the NOAA's research budget are crazy. Their measurements are some of the most important environmental data in the world. Without that information we'll be a blind society, and the field will be open to misinformation."

Most scientists agree that if the Montreal Protocol and its strengthening amendments are adhered to, the rate of ozone depletion will peak some time in the beginning of the next century. Thereafter, the ozone layer will begin a very slow process of regeneration. But, Gurney points out, "That only means things will stop getting worse in 10 or 15 years. Our main worry is that if stratospheric chlorine and bromide levels get much higher ... we could see exponential rates of depletion." In other words, deregulation could produce a collapse of the ozone layer.

President Clinton and his low-profile sidekick Al Gore—once dubbed "Mr. Ozone" by the likes of Rush Limbaugh because of his green rhetoric—are not expected to ride to the rescue. So far the White House has said nothing about ozone regulation or how the president will react to the GOP's legislative surgery. However, Washington-based activists say that neither DeLay's, Doolittle's, nor Miller's bills is likely to be signed into law in its original form. A watered-down, Clinton-approved version of the GOP proposals is expected to become law, which could mean that little new regulation will be accomplished this November, when the 150 signatory nations of the Montreal Protocol meet in Vienna to amend the agreement. ◀

Christian Parenti is a graduate student at the London School of Economics and a freelance writer.

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IN THE ARTS

Safety last

Todd Haynes' new film explores the dark, antiseptic heart of suburban America.

By Pat Dowell

Even before she's diagnosed with an illness that diminishes her affluent California lifestyle, housewife Carol White (Julianne Moore) in Todd Haynes' new movie, *Safe*, seems to be the incredible shrinking woman, disappearing from life with every tentative gesture. As her name suggests, she leads a pallid existence, tiptoeing between her antiseptic tract mansion, her exercise classes (where she doesn't even break a sweat) and the local shops in which she transacts her errands.

Carol seems to have as satisfying an exchange with the woman who runs the dry cleaning shop as she does with her husband—at least that's the way it looks when Carol and Greg are making love in the opening scenes. In a bedroom soothing unto death in subdued shades of peach and aqua, Carol lies absently frowning, looking somewhat removed from her husband's attentions.

In the locker room after aerobics class an acquaintance talks about how "we don't own our own lives," a remark that pointedly applies to Carol. Of course, Carol and Greg own many other things. Indeed, Carol's life appears to be organized around arranging them, seeing that they're polished, cleaned, dusted, and that they match. One morning two smolderingly black couches are delivered and placed in her pastel living room while she's out. She is distressed; they had ordered teal. And, indeed, those two couches are so boldly black that they look like they've torn a hole in the Whites' reality.

Among American directors, only Todd Haynes, the director of *Poison* (1991) and *Superstar* (1988), could communicate the horror, the sadness, and, yes, the comedy of Carol's debilitating plight. Haynes freights those hauntingly hued couches with symbolic meaning (ominously compounded by Carol's trip back to the furniture store, where she's informed that she had ordered black). But that is just the onset of Carol's dislocation: Haynes soon immerses her in a weird vortex of unexplained illness. First she sneezes, and Greg asks after her allergies; then she has a coughing fit behind a fuming truck in traffic; then a tidy little nosebleed while having her hair permed. Finally she vomits on Greg when he hugs her. Doctors test her to no avail—it's psychosomatic, they tell her, she needs a psychiatrist—and yet her ailment grows worse. Severe asthma at a baby shower. Convulsions at the cleaners. What is going on here?

On the surface, Haynes, in his characteristically guileless and deadpan way, seems to be telling a story about environmental illness or Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), a disease only now gaining a measure of official recognition in American society (as the end credits of *Safe* inform us rather oddly, MCS is "now recognized as a legitimate disability by ten United States Government Agencies, as well as numerous state and local governments. MCS sufferers are now protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act"). But from the choice of title to the tiniest detail (such as those couches), Haynes clearly has something bigger in mind. Carol suffers an even deeper malaise than MCS, and her life, so carefully choreographed to smother any flames of passion or curiosity or anger or even joy, has long been devoted to seeking safety.

Security is in a way the pinnacle of her class, the apex of denial that allows Carol, a very nice person, to disassociate herself from the world of people out there who are not so safe. MCS, which makes it impossible for her to pursue her tiny life of immense consumption, becomes at once another form of denial—a dire withdrawal from a life of denial. It

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also precipitates a forced confrontation with herself. The disease asks the question, if she is not that life, who is she?

Haynes, working with an anchored camera in serenely composed long shots, presents Carol's odyssey with exquisite austerity—some people will no doubt find *Safe* unbearably uneventful—but he has made, really, the most thrilling movie of the year. He is aided by Julianne Moore's best performance to date. The movie excites the mind and the spirit if not the hormones—though even they get a workout if you're at all susceptible to waves of anxiety.

Carol's unwilling but relentlessly deepening physical rejection of her suburban comfort proceeds with an accumulating dread that reaches a kind of panic point, ironically, when she seems finally to have found some relief. Replying to a bulletin-board flier ("Do you smell fumes? Are you allergic to the 20th Century?") she joins a support group of the environmentally impaired and then decides to try a month at an Arizona retreat called Wrenwood, "a safe haven for troubled times," its guru Peter smilingly calls it. The "long-termers" like Carol stay in rustic cabins on the valley floor, while above them Peter sleeps in a grand mansion. Another disconcerting element: glimpsed wandering among the cabins at a distance is a mysterious, slightly stumbling figure wrapped from head to toe in protective clothing. "He's just very, very afraid," Peter tells Carol. This shivering figure, so ominous and placidly dreadful, has been plucked out of the movie for the advertising art, and no wonder. He, she, it is the heart of *Safe*, and the movie's most haunting image, suggesting the end point of Carol's flight from the real.

Wrenwood seems the inevitable choice for Carol (was there ever a more unremarkable and fluttery little bird than she?), for it pares her life down to nothing but herself. This is not a very reassuring development, but then Haynes is not a sentimentalist. He is rather a poet and a visionary whose subject is identity, or difference (for Carol becomes a freak to her friends, her husband, her doctor), or, in an oddly old-fashioned way, the soul. At Wrenwood, Peter tells his charges that they cause their illnesses, forcing on them at once another, New-Age kind of denial and a certain truth: Carol can't get any safer than she finally is there, taking over a dead man's dwelling, a windowless porcelain-lined desert igloo seemingly destined for Mrs. White. We last see her staring into a mirror (the camera), whispering "I love you, I really love you," in her cozy sepulcher.

Has she found peace or the abyss? Is *Safe* a comedy or a tragedy? Certainly it is very sly—as with *Poison*, it tends to baffle audiences. Indeed, I've never heard a movie crowd so deathly quiet as the folks with whom I saw *Safe*. The only moment that provoked a wry laugh was when James Le Gros, playing a friend Carol makes at Wrenwood, tells of a similarly afflicted pal who "didn't know what was wrong with him except that every time he went into a mall he got terribly depressed."



Safe
Directed by
Todd Haynes

By that time, late in the movie, perhaps everyone got the joke. Earlier no one laughed when a tearful mother in the environmental-illness support group angrily refuted doctors who told her 5-year-old son that his allergies were psychosomatic. "He can't go into Chuck E. Cheese's! Why would he do that to himself?" Why indeed? But that of course is the point of the movie. People flee however they can, and seek safety not only from the chemicals of modern life but from its moral emptiness, its falseness, even its eerie abundance. Peter tells the inmates of Wrenwood that he has stopped reading the newspapers, no longer watches the news. "I'm afraid that if I believe the world is that destructive, that devastating, my immune system will too." Denial, denial everywhere—that is the observation of *Safe*, which is at once a compassionate and unflinching comment on a response that is increasingly common in our world. One of its more characteristic expressions, in fact, is moviegoing; *Safe* is all the more startling for turning the chief social use of film inside out. ◀

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IN PRINT

Renaissance man

By John K. Wilson

"It can't be that intriguing," said a stranger passing by me on the sidewalk as I read Newt Gingrich's magnum opus outlining how Americans can save civilization and still get rich. She was right, of course: On an intellectual level, *To Renew America* is merely pathetic, featuring a self-aggrandizing politician's feeble ruminations on America's destiny.

But intriguing indeed is the fact that a fourth-rate thinker is being championed as the leader of a revolution in Washington. Gingrich is not one of these Clintonesque goo-goo wonks who wants to merely "reform" the country. He is a self-styled revolutionary, specializing in the salvation of American civilization. Gingrich sees himself as a grand leader saving a great civilization from its own downfall, like the scheming "psychohistorians" in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series (which Gingrich mentions as one of the most important influences on his thinking) who secretly guide events to speed up a new renaissance. Reading Toynbee's *History of Civilization*, Gingrich believes that the key to a society's survival is "how its leadership elites respond" to a crisis.

To Renew America, then, is Gingrich's own elite jeremiad, a clarion call for Americans to follow him to the ends of his anti-government ideology. Gingrich, of course, didn't actually write *To Renew America*: In the acknowledgments, there is a line thanking "my cowriter" Bill Tucker, although the cover and title page omit Tucker—when you're pretending to be an intellectual, it doesn't look good to admit that you had a ghostwriter. And *To Renew America* bears all the obvious signs of being ghostwritten—and rather badly ghostwritten, to boot. One finds the usual clichés (the book actually opens by declaring, "These are the best of times and the worst of times, as Charles Dickens wrote"), the unproven assertions (a revolution doesn't need footnotes), the bland Perot-like lines ("without personal responsibility there cannot be freedom. It is just that simple."), and the dumbed-down 10-word sentences written so that a fifth-grader (or a member of Congress) can read them.

Despite his inflated rhetoric about the "third wave" information age, the details of Gingrich's political plan are little more than warmed-over Reaganomics: Cut welfare, cut taxes on the rich, increase defense spending and pretend that wealth will trickle down to everyone by unimpeded economic growth.

The Contract with America, though, was truly inspired politics—not because of its role in winning the 1994 elections (few voters knew or cared about the Contract), but in how it has allowed Gingrich to consolidate power after the elections. The Contract has earned Gingrich the uncritical devotion of the freshman Republicans who, in his words, "went through scripting and practice before they were even sworn in." The fruits of this party discipline will be staggeringly destructive, to judge by *To Renew America*. According to Gingrich, "[W]e need to revise welfare so that going to work never lowers your standard of living." But Gingrich's Republicans have shown little interest in raising the living standards of the working class. They have moved to reduce the earned-income tax credit, eliminate the minimum wage and prevent health care reform that would cover the working poor. Gingrich thinks we should repeal the welfare state and return to a traditional American philosophy: "If you don't work you won't eat."

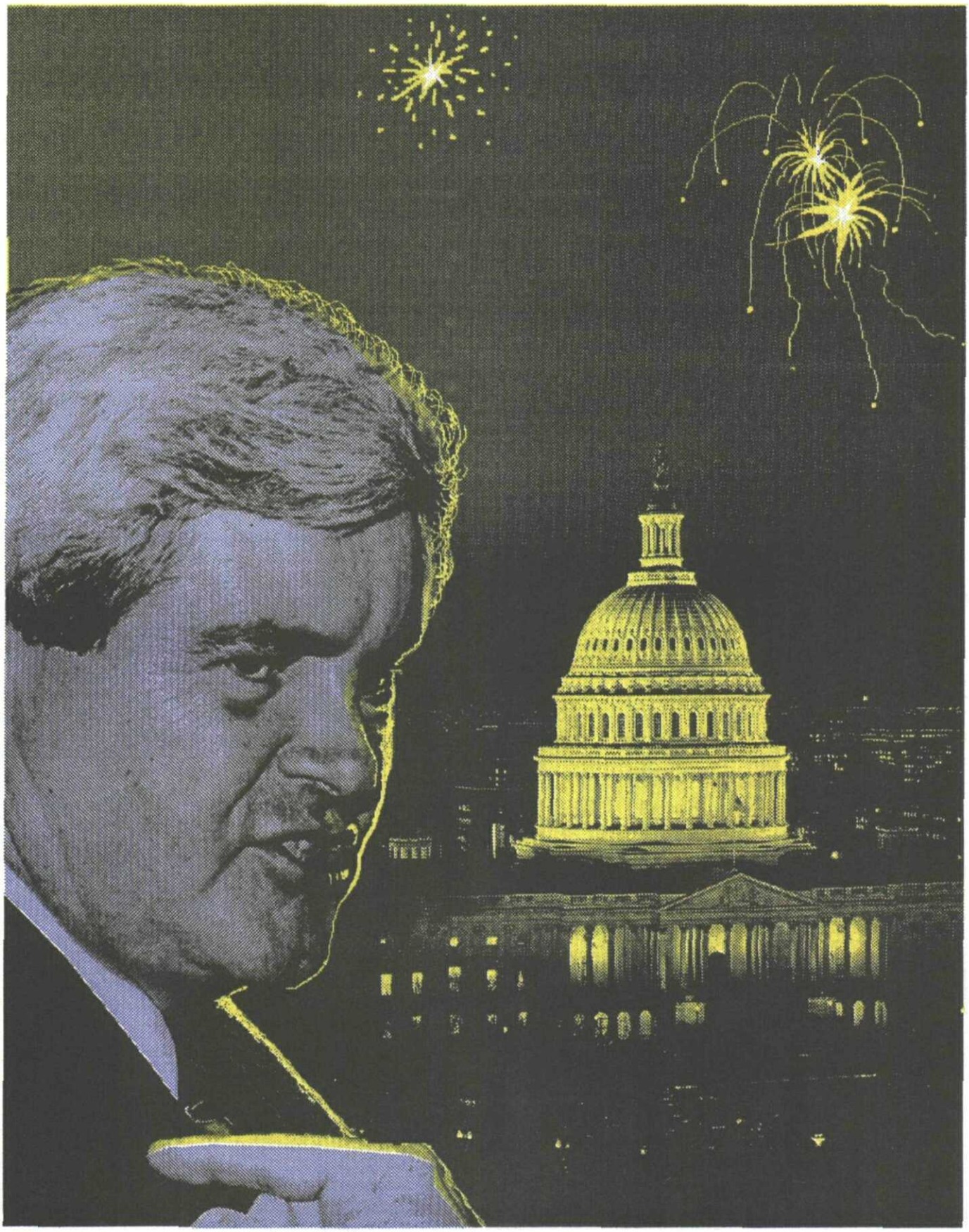
In Gingrich's brave new world, any measure to bleed government dry is a triumph for civilization. Like Reagan, Gingrich blames government for every problem. He believes, for example, that the worldwide information system was created by "unknown entrepreneurs" because "no government could have planned this system. In fact, an active government, in collaboration with the few older companies, probably would have done everything it could to put roadblocks in the way." He seems totally unaware that the Internet (and computer technology generally) were produced under the aegis of the Department of Defense—hardly a scrappy entrepreneurial outfit. Similarly, Gingrich argues that drug companies won't create drugs for "a rare genetic disease that affects only a few thousand people" because the sales could never "cover the costs of shepherding the drug through the FDA." In fact, the FDA procedures are only a tiny cost compared to the price of research and development.



To Renew America
By Newt Gingrich
HarperCollins
260 pp., $24

Nor is Gingrich's unsteady command of the facts restricted to the present. For a historian, he makes some remarkably stupid factual errors, such as his claim that "the centrali-

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ty of God and religion" in the Jamestown Colony is "unmistakable." Gingrich also devotes nearly a page to quoting Benjamin Franklin at the Constitutional Convention when he urged prayer at a critical moment. In the world of Gingrich, "the convention heeded Franklin's eloquent plea"—in reality, the Founders refused to have a prayer. Gingrich cites Thomas Jefferson as one of those who invoked God to argue "that blacks could not legitimately be enslaved in a free country"—but this former history professor omits the fact that Jefferson owned slaves and took a razor blade to his Bible to excise explicitly spiritual passages. It's not surprising that Gingrich was too incompetent to get tenure at a tiny college like West Georgia State; what's surprising is that by recycling a few bad ideas from outdated bestsellers like *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*, Gingrich is convincing people he's a serious thinker.

"No civilization can survive for long with 12-year-olds having babies, 15-year-olds killing one another, 17-year-olds dying of AIDS, and 18-year-olds getting diplomas they can't read," Gingrich writes, repeating one of his most cherished payoff lines. Of course, like most of Gingrich's scarifying anecdotes, this litany is woefully inaccurate: Twelve-year-olds are not "filling our maternity wards," as he claims, and few AIDS victims are 17. But, more to the point, Gingrich has consistently fought efforts to deal with these problems. He opposes gun control and more resources for education and has done nothing to rein in the homophobic far right in Congress.

Instead of mobilizing government to respond to the crises of our "civilization," Gingrich hopes to police antisocial conduct through austerity measures. For instance, he advocates cutting payments to women on welfare to reduce abortions "since without the financial support of the government young people were less likely to engage in casual sex." That's right: Teenagers have sex because the government pays them to do it. Later, Gingrich suggests that the real cause of illegitimacy and gang violence among American teenagers is that poor children are not taught standard English: "The final result is an angry young man who feels that violence is the only way he can express himself, or a young girl who thinks that the only great accomplishment she can achieve in life is to have a baby."

If such scenarios seem bleak, not to worry. Gingrich believes the technology of the private sector will soon deliver us from all government-funded evils. In a decade, says Gingrich, you will have a "wall-size, high-definition television" and "your home office [will be] filled with communications devices, so you can ignore rush-hour traffic." When sick, "you sit in your diagnostic chair and communicate with the local health clinic." And "if you face some rare or life-threatening disease, information systems will allow you to study the most advanced work around the world." Because there is so much information, "health care has become more flexible and convenient—and less expensive." Nor do the health care techno-reveries end there. According to Gingrich, the future will find American doctors performing surgery in India via computer.

With a utopian vision this bizarre, it's no surprise that Gingrich's solutions to the health care crisis are completely inadequate. First of all, a "diagnostic chair" in every home would be an extraordinarily expensive and wasteful device. Second, the information revolution will not lower medical costs. Even if you could find and understand the latest medical research, it wouldn't cure you. As for the virtual surgery scenario, Gingrich doesn't explain exactly how a surge of rich foreigners getting medical treatment will enable poor Americans to receive access to care they can't afford.

But then economics doesn't really seem to be Gingrich's strong suit, either. He believes, for example, that "the Information Revolution is breaking up" gigantic corporations and leading us back to 1830s America—a curious notion indeed, considering that Gingrich's publisher is HarperCollins, a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's enormous media empire. In fact, much of the information revolution is bringing increasingly immense media conglomerates into play, as witnessed by the recent buyouts of ABC by Disney and of CBS by Westinghouse.

In the words of Gingrich, "When people turn toward political leaders and government for help, all too often they encounter meaningless platitudes." Yet Gingrich offers platitudes that are not merely meaningless, but malignant. Gingrich's scowling defense of civilization's values and sunny vision of future technological bliss conceal a much harsher reality, that of a powerful political leader determined to tear out social programs and regulations, leaving government funding only for tax exemptions, corporate welfare (which goes unmentioned), defense spending and similar aid earmarked for the wealthy elite. If the Republican Congress succeeds in making Gingrich's agenda law, one cannot help but suspect that students in the future will call up *To Renew America* on their computers with the touch of a finger and marvel at its stupidity and all the human misery its author caused. ◀

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John K. Wilson is editor of *Democratic Culture* and author of The *Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education* (Duke University Press).

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Rogues' gallery

By **William D. Hartung**

When Bill Clinton announced recently that he was planning to reduce the federal deficit to zero over the next 10 years *without cutting a dime from the defense budget*, I had the queasy, irrational feeling that I was watching a sequel to *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Clinton had, after all, only just returned from his junket to New Hampshire to make nice with Newt Gingrich. It seemed as though Gingrich's love of all things high-tech—especially nifty new weapons systems—had rubbed off on our impressionable commander in chief.

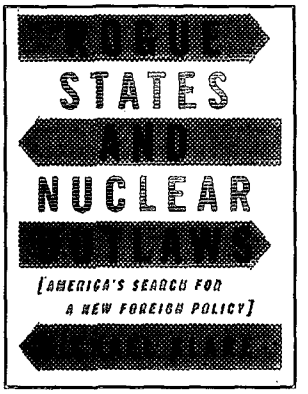
Of course, Clinton has long been in thrall to the Pentagon and its military contractors. Indeed, the absence of any real debate between the major parties on defense spending is a national scandal, on a par with Watergate or Iran-contra. The Clinton administration wants to spend about $260 billion a year on the military, in perpetuity—a figure right around the average Pentagon budget during the Cold War. The Republican-controlled Congress, meanwhile, thinks that's too little and would like billions to keep afloat gold-plated systems like the B-2 bomber—which the Pentagon has disavowed any need for—and a new, improved version of Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" missile defense system. So with no Soviet threat, and indeed no Soviet Union, and with the United States spending more than twice as much as all its potential adversaries *combined*, the defense budget debate only revolves around questions such as whether taxpayers should continue to fund a few big-ticket items the Pentagon doesn't even want. And given the current mania for budget-cutting, the obeisance our government pays to the defense leviathan lurches from the ludicrous to the obscene. It goes without saying that every dollar wasted on Cold War weaponry will come directly out of programs that feed, educate, house or provide health care for the most vulnerable members of our society.

Michael Klare, a professor of world security studies at Hampshire College, is able to survey this dismaying and absurd spectacle with remarkable discernment and rigor. As a critical and independent student of the national security state, Klare's track record is long and distinguished. In his 1972 classic, *War Without End*, he laid bare the process by which U.S. strategists planned to embroil our country in "new Vietnams" by fighting national liberation movements with military rather than diplomatic means. In his 1977 study, *Supplying Repression*, Klare supplied the first detailed analysis of the channels through which American companies and government agencies routed "small arms"—everything from rifles and hand grenades to instruments of torture—to repressive regimes from Chile to Guatemala to Iran. And in *American Arms Supermarket* (1984), Klare wrote what continues to be the single most useful exposition of the motives and methods driving U.S. arms sales policy.

In *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws*, Klare once again shows himself to be ahead of the curve in decoding and debunking U.S. doctrines on military strategy. The book engages a simple, but largely neglected, question at the heart of U.S. security issues: Does the Pentagon actually have a plan for the post-Cold War era, and if so, what is it? Klare describes in detail how the Pentagon, deprived of its familiar Cold War enemy, the Soviet Union, scrambled to come up with a new set of enemies—heavily armed Third World regimes hot on the trail of their very own weapons of mass destruction. Every Third World despot has now been deemed a possible Saddam-in-the-making, and the Pentagon is now awash in visions of refighting the Gulf War—or at least being funded at levels sufficient to refight the Gulf War—at a moment's notice.

In advancing this argument, Klare stoically wades through reams of analyses published by the Pentagon, the relevant committees of Congress and Washington think tanks. One of the great contributions of this work is his ability to distill the essence of the new strategic thinking in Washington in terms that the average citizen can understand and act upon.

But Klare's book is much more than a feat of endurance. He has brought to the task a striking knack for getting to the bottom of U.S. strategic thinking by asking questions Pentagon planners often seem to overlook. For example, Klare takes a credible first cut at the basic questions that should be motivating U.S. strategy in the post-Cold War era: 1)What are the major causes of the current rash of ethnic and territorial conflict?; and 2) What kinds of conflicts will U.S. troops likely be fighting in the foreseeable future? Klare's answers to these questions make it abundantly clear that the Pentagon's plan to be ready to fight an endless round of Iraq-style conflicts is as misguided as it is dangerous.



Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws: America's Search for a New Foreign Policy
By Michael Klare
Hill and Wang
281 pp., $25

First and foremost, Klare makes it emphatically clear that the current Pentagon strategy is *not* the result of some sober

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assessment of the current world scene, or even the result of worst-case scenarios run amok. The Pentagon was busy searching for a post-Cold War justification for its largesse several years before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. Luckily for the U.S. military, Saddam Hussein challenged them on the ideal terrain for displaying its new strategy—and new weaponry—in the best possible light. This, in turn, fueled a false sense of security regarding the fitness of the "rogue doctrine" for approaching other emerging conflicts.

From the start, Klare argues, the idea had been to devise a scary enough scenario to justify spending levels that could support the Pentagon and its contractor base in the lavish style to which they had grown accustomed. Indeed, several other prospective foundations for America's defense policies had been assessed and found wanting: terrorism, guerilla warfare, refugee flows and environmental degradation, to name but a few. As Klare notes, these all failed the critical test: They provided little or no rationale for building the new generation of weaponry that the Pentagon had waiting in the wings. Only a heavily armed "regional hegemon" like Iraq or North Korea could even begin to supply enough of a "threat" to justify spending more than a quarter of a trillion dollars per year on the U.S. military—and even this scenario required considerable overstatement of the actual threats the United States might face, as Klare ably demonstrates.



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This critical Pentagon planning effort took the form of a Joint Chiefs of Staff study overseen by its then-chairman Colin Powell, now the mainstream media's anointed successor to Dwight D. Eisenhower. But while Eisenhower sounded the first alarm about the "military-industrial complex" in his 1961 farewell speech, Powell has spearheaded an aggressive effort to breathe life back into the bloated shell of the Cold War defense colossus. Clearly, those liberals and moderates who were preparing to board the Powell bandwagon on the theory that an ex-military person would be uniquely positioned to cut defense spending need to read Klare's eye-opening account of Powell's role in the post-Cold War Pentagon.

From Powell's anti-rogue strategy to Les Aspin's scenarios for fighting multiple "Iraq-sized" contingency wars to Clinton's now-familiar capitulation to every Defense Department fantasy, Klare traces every logical thread that has helped produce our current state of policy gridlock on defense strategy. Klare argues persuasively that as long as the Pentagon is allowed to maintain that it is reasonable to be prepared to fight two regional wars simultaneously, there is no further hope for the reduction of defense spending.

Klare also provides plenty of empirical evidence to dispel the Pentagon's geopolitical hobgoblins. He notes, for example, that there aren't even two "Iraq-sized" adversaries available to fight. Iraq itself has had its military forcibly "downsized" as a result of the Gulf War and the ensuing United Nations sanctions. North Korea, which has forces that come close to what Saddam Hussein had accumulated in 1990, is squared off against a South Korean military that boasts a superior air force, better trained troops and a stronger industrial base. Even if a single "Iraq-sized" contingency could be scraped together out of these scattered and preoccupied foes, the United States would almost certainly not be fighting alone, but alongside well-equipped allies such as South Korea and Israel.

If fighting two major regional conflicts at once makes no sense, what would be a more sensible basis for U.S. defense strategy in the post-Cold War era? Klare's final chapter, "Beyond the Rogues: Military Doctrine in a World of Chaos," offers a useful first stab at this complex problem, emphasizing the importance of preventing and/or limiting ethnic conflicts at the outset through means such as limits on the global weapons trade, diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving regional conflicts and timely deployment of U.N. peacekeeping forces. He also notes that any serious strategy for stemming the spread of nuclear weapons must include energetic efforts to reduce the United States' oversized nuclear arsenal, so that the U.S. government is not in the embarrassing posture of telling would-be nuclear weapons states in the developing world to "do as I say, not as I do."

The final chapter is the most tentative section of the book, but that is perhaps as it should be. There are no simple answers to the security conundrums of the 1990s and beyond, and we shouldn't pretend that there will be. But Klare also makes it clear that we can't afford to rely on the self-interested expertise of the Pentagon. He raises all the key questions the United States needs to address if we are ever going to come up with a sensible defense strategy for the new era in international relations. *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws,* in other words, is essential reading for any citizen seeking to challenge the witless "Pentagon-first" dogmas that have captured the hearts and minds of our elected representatives in Washington. ◀

William D. Hartung is a senior research fellow at the World Policy Institute at the New School for Social Research in New York City. He is also the author of *And Weapons for All* (HarperCollins).

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Continued from page 40

argued properly, Marxist ideas could convince anybody.

Before long, Mandel was back in the thick of radical activity. If there was ever a good time to be a Trotskyist, World War II was not it. The fascists and Communists alike were keen to wipe out the movement. And between them, they very nearly succeeded. Many of its founding members—including Mandel's teacher, Abraham Leon, were liquidated—and Mandel emerged as a leader of the Fourth International (a network of Trotsky's followers)—at the ripe old age of 22.

Only in 1962—with the publication in France of his two-volume work, *Marxist Economic Theory*—did Mandel begin to reach an audience beyond the world of tiny left-wing groups. (The book was translated into English in 1968.) That breakthrough work displayed the qualities of Mandel's mind already familiar to those who knew him as Ernst Germain (his "party" name).

For one thing, Mandel seemed to have read everything. He knew all the major European languages. He could draw on a vast store of information—historical and anthropological, as well as economic—to demonstrate his contention that Marx's analysis of capitalism retained its validity for the 20th century. He followed with interest the important social and political developments in every country containing at least two Trotskyists (which was, after all, a lot of countries).

And the man could *write*. His prose was clear and sharp and as jargon-free as he could make it. He would never survive in an American university today.

Most of all, he was prolific. In *Redemption*, Tariq Ali's wickedly funny 1990 satirical novel of the far left, Mandel appears, very thinly disguised, as the character of Ezra Einstein. Denied a dog when he was a child, Einstein in later life treated his typewriter as a substitute. He strokes it affectionately, "muttering as though it were a little pet." The machine becomes, as do many dogs, an extension of the owner's personality. "With its help, he produced over two dozen books, several scores of pamphlets, innumerable newspaper articles for the bourgeois press as well as the myriad publications of the movement, and of course several thousand internal documents."

Ah yes: the internal documents. Mandel did not merely advocate Leon Trotsky's ideas; he fought for them. And that meant, more often than not, fighting with other Trotskyists. News of this invigorating activity seldom reached the outside world. But some of these internal documents came my way in 1985. At the time, a friend and I were trying to figure out just what species of Marxist we were. We had pretty much ruled out the Trotskyists. Their groups appeared to consist—not to put too fine a point on it—of brain-dead, newspaper-vending zombies from outer space. But Mandel, plainly, was different. You could learn something from reading him.

And so it was that my friend and I developed a political routine. After a day of demonstrating against visiting contra leaders or handing out leaflets on behalf of striking Hormel meatpackers, we would adjourn with our fellow activists to a watering hole. There we would attempt to persuade them that the Soviet Union had to be understood as a "degenerated workers' state." (Several beers into the evening, the jokes would begin: Just how degenerated *were* those workers?) The analysis, of course, came from "the Old Man," as we called Trotsky. But our arguments came straight from Mandel. It seemed crucial to have a correct line on the nature of the Soviet Union. The world revolution depended on it!

The question naturally arises: What *were* we thinking of? They say the past is another country, and the people there speak with an accent we don't always understand. What lingers in my memory now is the urgency with which we debated. And that quality—that blend of passion and conviction—doubtless came from Mandel's example.

So it has been an experience in déjà vu, over this past month, to read the books Mandel published in the last year of his life. Building on the work of Soviet economist Nikolai Kondratieff—one of Stalin's victims—the revised edition of *Long Waves of Capitalist Development* (Verso, 1995) describes the history and dynamics of the 25-year cycles of capitalist development and contraction. For someone without training in economics, the volume is tough reading; its arguments were originally presented by Mandel as part of Cambridge University's Marshall lectures—a venue that suggests Mandel's reputation outside the far left is quite secure.

By contrast, most of the work in *Revolutionary Marxism and Social Reality in the Twentieth Century: Collected Essays* (Humanities Press, 1994) appeared originally in Trotskyist journals. Despite the extraordinary dullness of its title, the book is Mandel at his best: studies in an almost classical mode on Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and, of course, Trotsky. Particularly memorable is Mandel's brief essay on Solzhenitsyn—which admires the Russian dissident's artistry while not excusing the distortions of history in *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Ten years do take a toll on one's certainties. Rereading Mandel now, I find myself disagreeing with aspects of Mandel's ideology—but more than that, with his method. In his last major book, *Trotsky as Alternative* (Verso, 1995), Mandel simply restates the Old Man's ideas. It could have been published in 1985—or '75 or '65, for that matter.

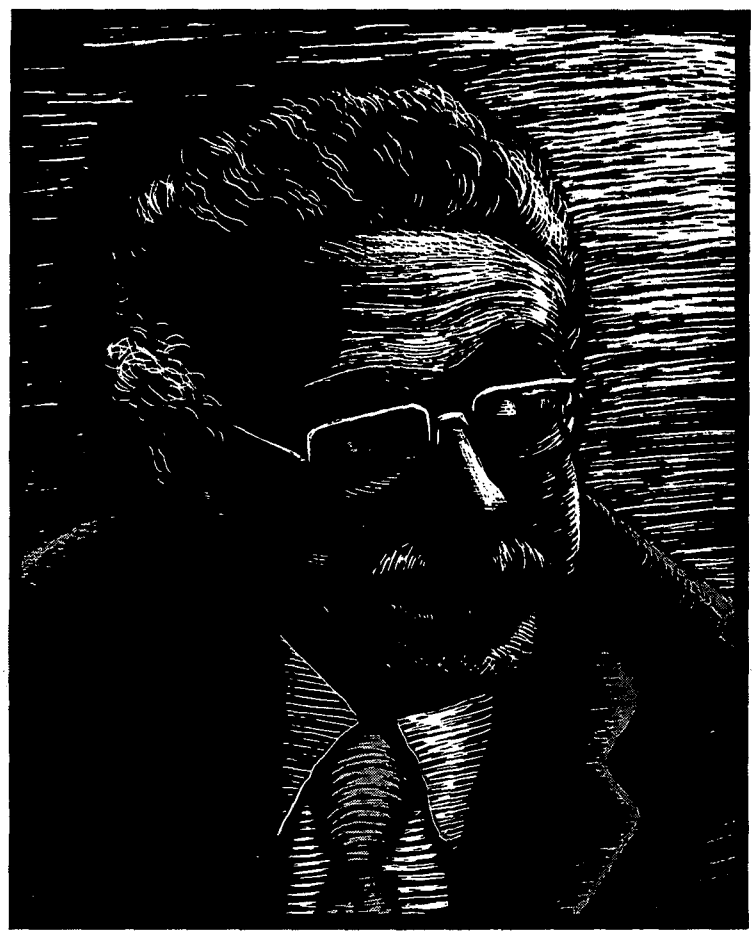
A rethinking of radical politics has been in order since 1989. But it was not on Mandel's agenda. No intellect could have been better prepared, in its prime, to analyze the new world disorder. Had Mandel believed that studying astrophysics would help him prove that we *must*, of necessity, create a world without war and exploitation, then he certainly would have learned enough to clinch the argument. But the world sometimes changes faster than our ideas. And it is sad to know that now his mind will never be able to catch up. ◀

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IN THE END

Requiem for a heavyweight

By Scott McLemee



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Some public figures can be called beloved—a few writers, for example, and still fewer politicians. But there are no economists. Why not? Economics has been labeled "the dismal science," and the aura of gloom seems to hover around its practitioners as well. Yet one happy exception does spring to mind: Ernest Mandel, author most famously of the magisterial 1972 study, *Late Capitalism*. When he died in Belgium on July 20, at the age of 72, people on several continents felt his passing as a loss. Throughout the 1960s and '70s, Mandel introduced a whole generation of radicals to Marxist economic theory.

To repay his efforts, several countries barred Mandel from crossing their borders, including the United States. He was denied a visa during the Nixon presidency. It happened again under the Reagan administration. There was a nice irony here. For Mandel was also persona non grata in the Soviet Union—being, after all, the most prominent interpreter of Leon Trotsky's ideas in the world.

Despite such notoriety, Mandel's name was scarcely a household name, the way that free-market guru Milton Friedman's is. Yet hundreds of thousands of people read his *Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory* (1969). And back when people first began talking about postmodernism—during the 1980s, when it became for many intellectuals the only game in town—Mandel's concept of late capitalism was on everyone's lips. Not that "everyone" had actually read Mandel; yet for a time it was *de rigueur* to seem that one had.

But for some people, discovering Mandel in the midst of lives as political activists was a revelation. His many books and pamphlets were more than interesting: They were proof that Marxism was still alive, not simply as a theory, but as a force for changing the world. And here, at least, I must drop the journalist's pretense to objectivity. Under the influence of Mandel's work, I became a Trotskyist—indeed, one of the "Mandelite" variety.

From the start, Ernest Mandel's life was wrapped up in left-wing politics. And it very nearly led to an early death. He was born in Germany in 1923, the son of a Communist journalist who eventually moved the family to Belgium. As a teenager, during the Nazi occupation, Mandel helped distribute anti-fascist propaganda. By the age of 16, he had been arrested three times. Revolutionary leafleting was no misdemeanor: Following his third arrest, Mandel was scheduled to be shipped off to Auschwitz.

While awaiting transportation to the death camp, Mandel began discussing socialism with his German captors. Some of the guards were sympathetic, and they helped him escape. From this experience, Mandel drew a conclusion that became key to the rest of his activity: If they were

Continued on page 39

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